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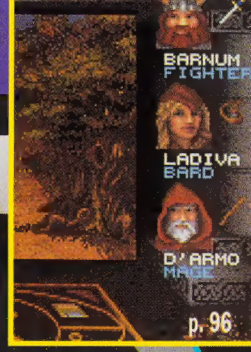
CRUSADERS OF THE DARK SAVANT



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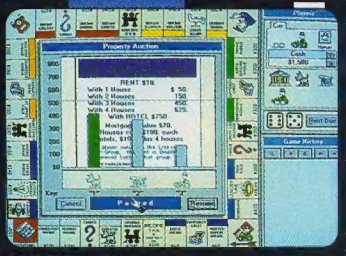

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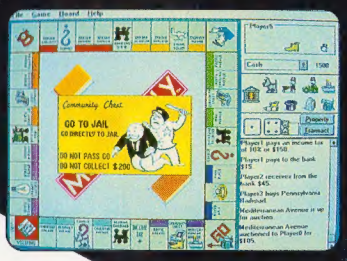

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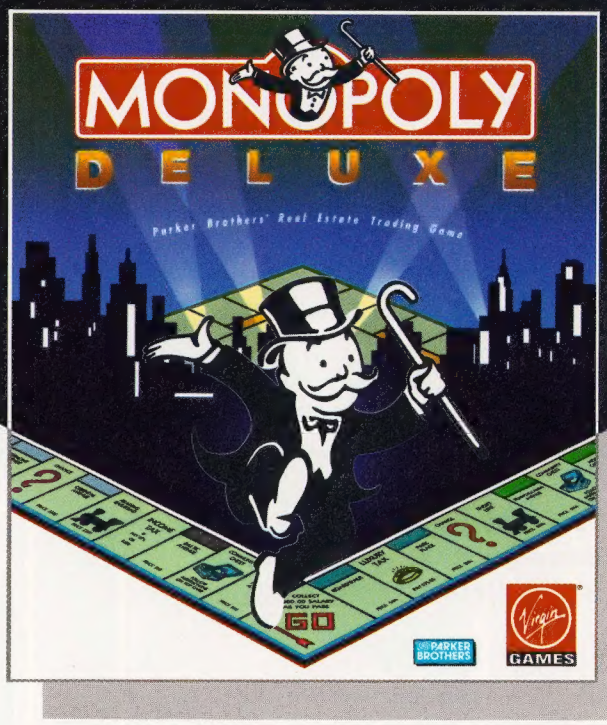

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EDITOR'S PAGE

LOOKING AHEAD

End of the year — time for resolutions and taking stock of the last 12 months, time to spend some money. The two, strange as it seems, *do* have something in common when it comes to PC entertainment. I'm ready to put together a few resolutions about how I'll spend my PC gaming dollars in the New Year.

Resolution #1. I won't play a game until it's ready. With production schedules stretching as long as it took to build the Pyramids, it's tough to wait. Still, with a rash of problem-plagued titles released in 1992 — monsters like Falcon 3.0 and Ultima VI come to mind, both posting patches on line — let someone else play guinea pig.

Resolution #2. I'll keep my CD-ROM drive another year. Multimedia is, more than anything else, a lesson in frustration. No other advance in PC gaming holds more potential, but dangles the carrot so tantalizingly out of reach. CD titles for the PC have been few in coming. But I'm willing to wait another year, fingers crossed, and hope that the multimedia promise comes true. (Apple's announcement of a CD-equipped Macintosh for the consumer crowd is encouraging; PC makers may wise up.)

Resolution #3. I'll refuse to play a game that recycles out-of-date software technology. Look and feel are important to game play, which, after all, is just another attempt to make us suspend some disbelief. War games that use dinky character-like graphics, role-playing games that refuse to abandon years-old graphics engines, adventure games with goofy soundtracks like repetitious circus music — they're outa my library. If I'm going to pay $60, $70, even $80 for a game, it better be on the cutting edge.

Resolution #4. I promise to buy a bigger hard-disk drive. You probably don't need a new computer to play today's games (unless you're using a 286), but it's likely you need more storage space. When even educational games dump megabytes onto a hard disk, not to mention 20-megabytes-plus goliaths like Wing Commander II, it's time to make room. Adding another hard-disk drive — you can buy a 200-megabyte drive for $500 or less — is one way to keep your computer current.

Resolution #5. I'll buy play-a-piece games. With so much to do and not enough time, I want games that let me play in segments, games that are easy to get into and out of, games I can play in the odd minutes I want a break from work. Windows games are perfect for this, but DOS games that let you save positions and, thanks to intuitive interfaces, are easy to re-enter, fit the bill, too.

These five resolutions aren't my whole list and won't be yours, either. But they're a start. Now, if I can only keep them.

MAN OF THE HOUR

A hearty *PCGames* welcome aboard to Bill Kennedy, the magazine's new editor in chief. Bill's been around the computer-magazine block a few times and comes off a stint with *SunWorld*, a publication dedicated to Sun Microsystems' advanced workstations. Look for Bill to fill this page in the coming months.

— Gregg Keizer, Consulting Editor

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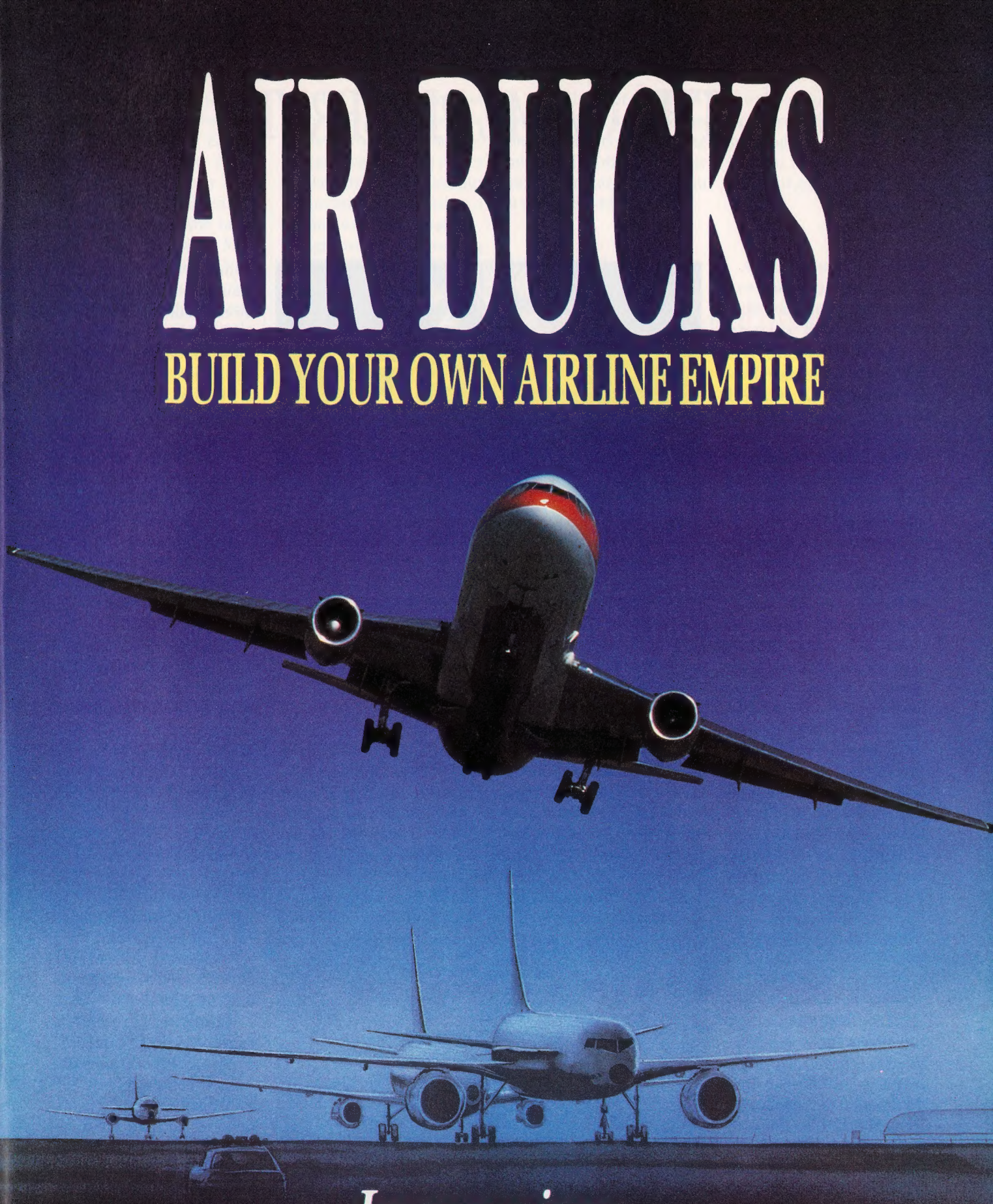

Impressions

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THE GAME PRESERVE

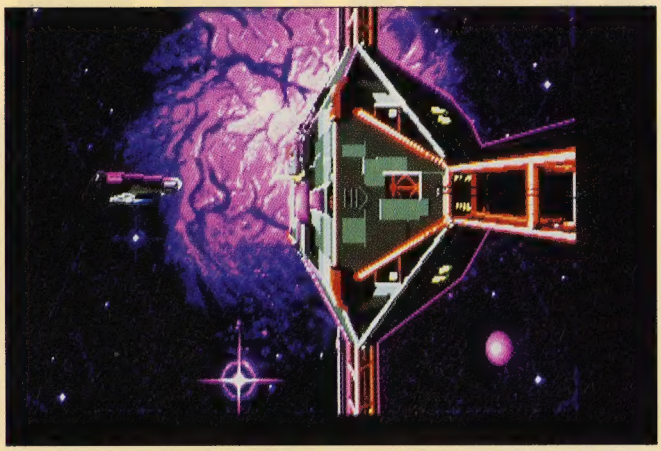
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD II

The date is one year after you've defeated the Guardian in Ultima VII; the place is Lord British's castle; and the occasion is an anniversary celebration of your victory. Suddenly the castle shakes, and the Guardian appears. He creates a stone shield impervious to magic around the castle and demands fealty; the price of disobedience is death. You, as the Avatar, must travel to unknown dimensions and retrieve the artifacts necessary to escape and defeat the Guardian.

Looking Glass Software and Origin Systems are aiming for a Christmas release of the second in the **Ultima Underworld** series, tentatively titled **Labyrinth of Worlds**. For more information, check out "In the Pits," this month's Role Call, p. 14, or call Origin Systems at (800) 999-4939.

BOGEY DOPE

"Tally-ho" on more bandits in the flight-simulator skies; Electronic Arts' **Birds of Prey** ($49.95) features 40 different planes ranging from MiG-29s to Rockwell B-1B and F117A stealth fighters. Players can choose from 12 different mission types that have a direct impact both on the player's personal record and a real-time war environment. Both sides are constantly active, launching planes, rebuilding damaged emplacements, and moving ground-based forces.



Nuke those aliens from the helm of your Mantis fighter.

For high-flying Mega-Fortress heavy hitters, the new **Operation Skymaster** mission disk ($34.95) offers more enemy weapons, aircraft, and 21 extra campaigns against North Korea and the Chinese both on the Korean peninsula and in the Philippines. The player assumes the roles of the five crew members of a renovated "super" B-52 bomber, confronting numerous enemy threats on the way to completing objectives.

Finally, on the horizon for chopper jockeys is NovaLogic's **Comanche Maximum Overkill**, a simulation of the Boeing Sikorsky Comanche RAH-66 attack helicopter. Maximum Overkill requires at least a 386SX with 4 megabytes of RAM, and uses a new modeling system called Voxel Space, which NovaLogic claims delivers 500 times more detail than traditional poylgon graphics. For more information on these products, contact Electronic Arts at (415) 571-7171.

If you want to fly farther and faster, you'll probably have your eye on **Operation Fighting Tiger** ($39.95), the first campaign disk for Falcon 3.0. The package features new planes to fly and to burn down (the General Dynamics/Japanese Air Self-Defense Force FSX, the Russian MiG-31, the Indian Mirage 2000, and the North Korean J-7 Air-guard), new weapons, new missions over Japan, Korea, India, and Pakistan, and an upgrade to the Falcon flight engine. Call Spectrum Holo-Byte at (510) 522-1164.

HOUSEGUESTS IN HELL

It's 1992, and once again Origin cofounder Richard "Lord British" Garriott spent more than $50,000 to turn his West Austin, Texas, Britannia Manor into a "full-contact Ultimate Haunted House." As part of a biannual tradition, parties of four people enter Garriott's house and find themselves on a quest just like those in computer games. The difference is that all the monsters, minions, and mages are very real. At the 1990 haunted house, visitors had to recover a gargoyle's severed finger and deliver it to a demon to make their escape. This year, harried adventurers came face to face with the Guardian. Brrrr! **— C.C.**

PARAPROSE OR MICROGON?

If you prefer a cold hard vacuum to the wild blue yonder, check out this new title: **XF5700 Mantis Experimental Fighter** ($69.95).

Mantis was originally a Paragon product marketed by MicroProse, but the latter decided to buy the whole ball of wax. Paragon, known as MicroProse Greensburg, is now a wholly owned subsidiary of MicroProse.

Of course, none of this will make a bit of difference as you scream through the void at the helm of Earth's

newest and most potent fighter. Players become members of Fist of Earth's (F.O.E.) elite fighter corps, defending humanity from a looming alien threat. At your disposal is the latest technology: missiles, Mass Driver cannons, Quad Jump drives, and a sophisticated navigational system. To get into the battle, contact MicroProse at (410) 771-1151.

TWO FOR THE ROAD

Okay, so you've got this really hot 486 notebook PC, and you're tired of staring at Lotus 1-2-3 and Tetris in grey-scale, so you decide it's time for a little turn-and-burn. Your notebook has the horsepower to handle the latest stuff, and you're not lacking for memory and hard-drive space. So you load up Falcon 3.0, turn up the speakers, and reach for your joystick, right? Wrong.

Until now, that is. Genovation Inc. and DigiSpeech are about to release products that will help you take your hi-test games on the road with you.

Genovation's **Parallel Game Port** ($45 at press time), or PGP, is a parallel-port adapter/software package that lets you connect your joystick to a computer without a game port, specifically your portable. As a bonus, the PGP comes with an 8K TSR that lets you program any key or switch on the joystick. You can redefine up to 16 such keys to produce either single commands or macros, which you can then save as a template. The first version of the PGP doesn't include a pass-through connector, so you have to switch cables to play with your stick, but Genovation is planning a version to correct that.

DigiSpeech is upgrading its sound module to the **Model 301**, which will be fully SoundBlaster compatible and provide sound through the parallel port — a real breakthrough for notebook users.

SIIIERRA

Gobliiins, the first fruit of a distribution agreement between Sierra On-Line and Coktel Vision of France, recently arrived on American shores. According to Ken Williams, president and CEO of Sierra, "[Gobliiins] was so much like one of our games, I wasn't sure if I should sue the company or buy it."

The object of Gobliiins is to track down the dark force that's gleefully abusing the good king's voodoo doll. To find the force, Hooter, Dwayne, and Bobo embark on a warped quest, filled with level after level of twisted object, inventory, and logic puzzles. Sierra is so confident of Gobliins' success, the company has already announced the spring release of **Gobliiins 2**. For more information, call Sierra at (206) 683-4468.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

'Jevver wake up one morning and find yourself square on the horns of a dilemma? You just couldn't decide whether you wanted to build a Roman city from the ground up or rule the entire Empire.

Well, if Impressions Software has its way, you'll be able to do both with **Caesar**. After building a thriving city on a piece of scrubland assigned to you — complete with roads, aqueducts, soldiers, forums, bath houses, slave labor, and factories — you'll be judged on several criteria. If you've proved yourself worthy, you'll move on to greater responsibilities. Eventually, you could work your way up to the highest possible rank: Caesar. But don't look to be battling the barbarian hordes anytime soon — Caesar has only recently been loaded into the development hopper. But once 1993 rolls around, serving in the Roman Legion might be a whole new ball game.

Gobliiins: set loose on a quest to foil the forces of evil.

THREE-DEE-TWO

After spending a few evenings splattering the walls with Nazis, what could be more fun than using larger weapons to splatter the walls with more Nazis? Hot on the heels of its action hit Wolfenstein 3-D (Reviews, November 1992, p. 46), the folks at FormGen and Id Software have released **Wolfenstein 3-D: Spear of Destiny** ($59.95).

While the original started out as shareware, SOD is a commercial-only episode with more than 15 floors. As you make your way through a smoothly scrolling, first-person, 3-D environment, you'll come face to face with familiar enemies — brown-shirted guards and blue-uniformed SS — plus mutants, officers, and area bosses like Trans Grösse and the ÜberMutant. Call FormGen at (416) 857-4141 for more information.

STUNT DRIVER

Colorado Spectrum is at it again with the **Mouse Wheel** ($49.95) for driving simulators. It's almost identical to the Mouse Yoke, except it replaces the airplane-style handles with a steering wheel. To use the device, you clamp the metal base to your desk, slip your mouse under an elastic "seat belt" on top of the unit, and slide the yoke into the base under the mouse. The shaft of the yoke moves the mouse ball,

translating wheel movements into corresponding mouse signals. The Mouse Wheel ships with Broderbund's **Stunts**. For more information, call Colorado Spectrum at (800) 238-5983.

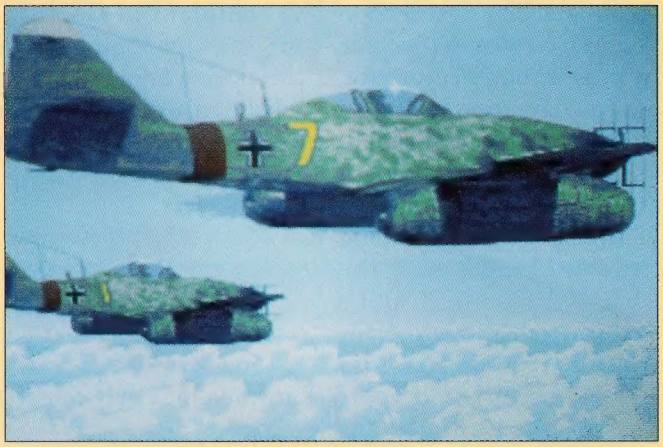
READYSOFT ALMOST READY

Whether you love sequels or hate them, they sell like hotcakes, and computer games are no exception. Therefore in the glorious tradition of Hollywood, ReadySoft is working on **Dragon's Lair III: The Curse of Mordread** ($59.95).

As Dirk the Daring, you must once again risk life and limb for that Princess of Pulchritude, that Jinxed Minx, that Damsel in Eternal Distress — Daphne. This time, the evil witch Mordread has captured and imprisoned your beloved family. Can you rescue them before they're trapped forever in the Vortex of Eternity? Probably.

When you finish up with Mordread, you can put your feet back on the ground — in a tank. ReadySoft is distributing Empire's **Campaign** ($59.95), a wargames simulator designed with 20th-century warfare in mind.

Set during the WWII years of 1939 to 1945, Campaign features most of the hardware available during that period. You control the movements of more than 100 vehicles and 15 guns, including artillery and antitank weapons. You plan battles to the last detail using local factories, supply convoys, and air support; each vechicle can be driven independently in battle. Contact ReadySoft at (416) 731-4175 for more information.



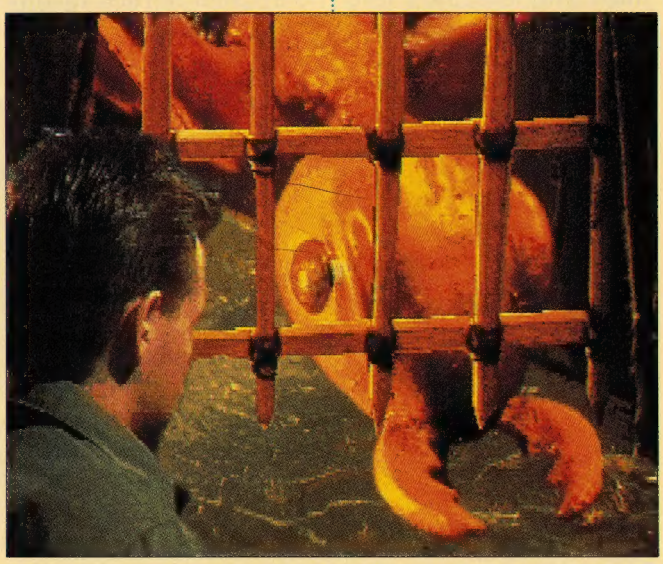
Replay the battles of World War II in Campaign.

ACCESS-IBLE ADVENTURE

Access Software has never been much for subtlety, and its latest project goes straight to the source of over-the-top splashiness. Software designers Chris Jones and Doug Vandegrift claim to have recaptured the fun of 1950s drive-in movies with **Amazon: The Guardians of Eden** ($69.95). Asked to describe the package, Jones said, "Try to visualize all the 'B' jungle movies of the '50s distilled into one great experience." Throw in some mysterious packages, mysterious (and beautiful) women, mysterious enemies, and mysterious 10-foot ants, and you've got a great recipe for adventure. For more information, call Access Software at (800) 800-4880.

QUICK PICKS

Domark has released a collection of five classic arcade games in **Tengen's Arcade Hits** ($39.95). Hardcore quarter droppers and casual game fiends alike will remember **Hard Drivin' II: Drive Harder**, a stunt-car extravaganza that includes a track editor for more thrills and spills; **A.P.B.**, a cops-and-robbers action game complete with high-speed pursuit, donut stops, and litterbugs and other hardened criminals; **Klax**, a bizzare Tetris-mutant tile-stacking game; **Escape from the Planet of Robot Monsters**, a multilevel cartoon adventure starring ray guns, kidnapped scientists, and evil robot hordes; and **Toobin'**, a wild inner-tube race through white water, logs, branches, crocodiles, rocks, and soda cans hurled by your competitors. Plug in your arcade machine: Call (415) 513-8929.



It's '50s movie fun all over again with Amazon: Guardians of Eden.

For those who do Windows, Microsoft has released **Microsoft Entertainment Pack for Windows Volume 4** ($39.95), a seven-word title for a seven-game addition to the series. You'll probably recognize **Chess**, **Tic-Tac-Drop**, and **Dr. Black Jack**, but the feature attractions are **Chip's Challenge**, **JezzBall**, **Maxwell's Maniac**, and **Go Figure**.

Volume 4 supports Windows 3.1 sound-play capability in Chip's Challenge, Chess, Maxwell's Maniac, and JezzBall, letting soundboard owners enjoy digital audio. Pack fans should call Microsoft at (206) 882-8080.

SEARCHIN' URCHINS

These days, the correct answer to the question "Where in the world is Carmen Sandiego?" is "Everywhere!" The latest addition to La Casa Sandiego is **Where in**

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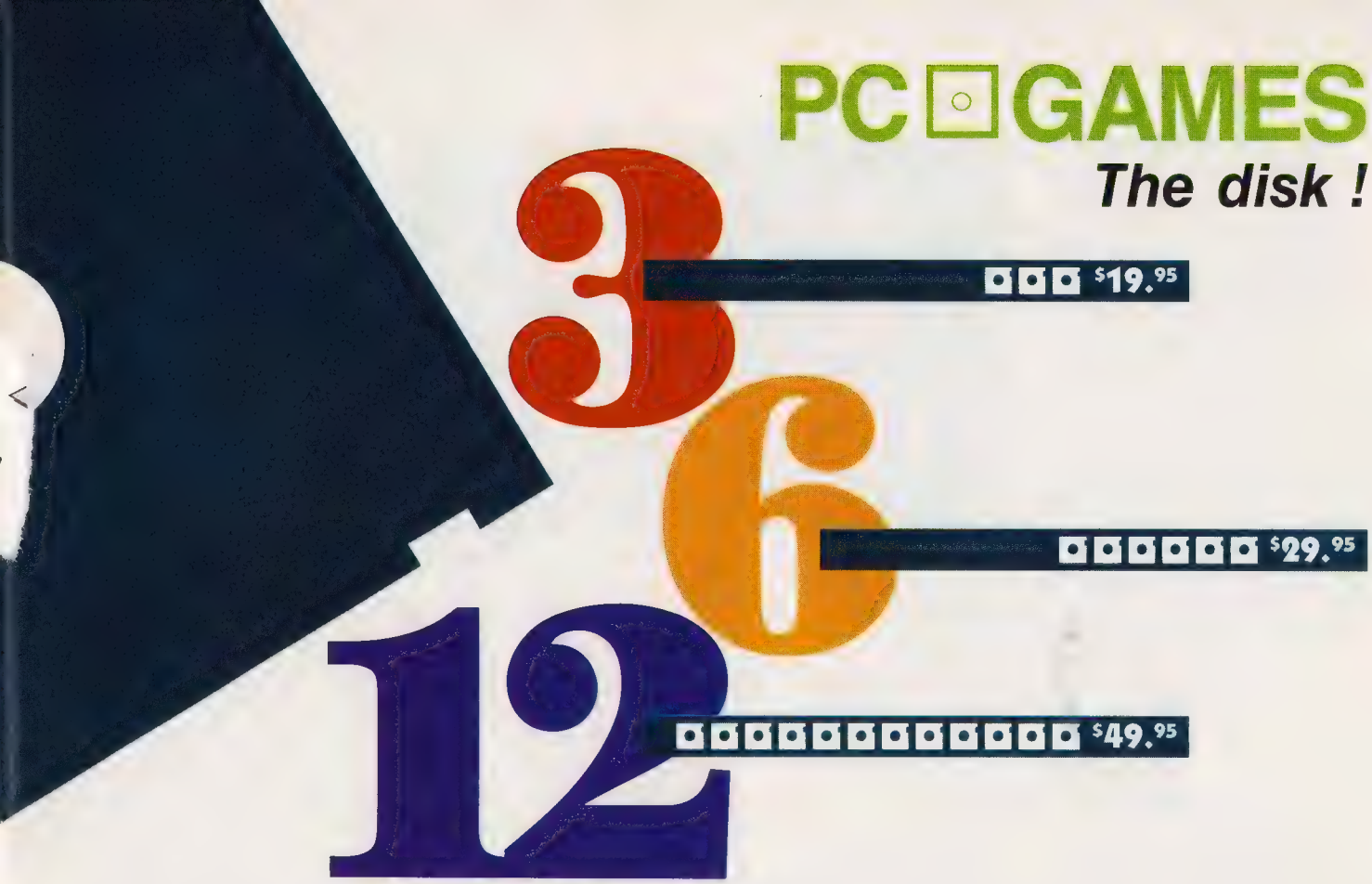
The disk !



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PCGames and *PC Games* the entertainment disk are two great products from two separate companies, both dedicated to bringing you the best in entertainment software.

the USA Is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe Edition ($79.95), which integrates digitized photos, topographical color maps, and 15 new villians.

Members of Carmen's gang (or perhaps the ultra-villainess herself) have stolen some of America's most precious treasures and landmarks, including the countdown clock from the Kennedy Space Center, the Mardi Gras floats, and all the neon in Las Vegas. To solve each caper, Acme Detectives will have to wade through some of more than 3000 clues about U.S. geography and culture. Other improvements include an enhanced interface, dozens of animations, and six talking characters. To get the skinny, contact Brøderbund at (415) 382-4400.

The Learning Company strikes back with **Time Riders in American History** ($59.95), an educational game that gives players a behind-the-scenes look at 400 years of the U.S. experience.

Battle Dr. Thanatopsis Dread and the Dread News Network (DNN), who have captured a communications satellite and are transmitting twisted headlines of important events in American history. As team leader of the Time Riders, you must uplink accurate information to the news satellite before it passes out of range and all of history is lost.

Time Riders includes 2300 clues and facts, focusing on a variety of famous people from a broad range of social and ethnic groups. Historical events become more challenging as you progress, moving from recognizable events to lesser-known (but still important) ones. For more information call The Learning Company at (510) 792-2101.

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EA-T 'EM UP

Will anyone that Electronic Arts hasn't declared war on please stand up? On second thought, maybe you'd better stay low — give these guys half an excuse and they'll write a war game about you.

On the medieval front, Mindcraft has **Siege** ($59.95), a real-time strategic simulator in which you command the forces assaulting (or defending) one of many intricately designed castles. Troops range from the mundane (peasants and knights) to the fantastic (wizards, trolls, spiders, and elves). Siege offers a built-in "design your own onslaught" editor, and the option to play a single scenario or an entire campaign. An expansion disk is planned, with head-to-head capability and more castles, scenarios, and troops.

Spearing elves might be fun, but for Harpoon fans, nothing beats a good international naval conflict. Three-Sixty has released the **Harpoon Designers' Series** ($49.95), with 12 new scenarios (reflecting recent changes in world geopolitics) for each Harpoon Battle-Set you own.

Also new are **Harpoon version 1.3**, a ***Strategy and Tactics*** guide, and a player's library that lets you create mixed-nation scenarios simulating joint operations with the world's great naval powers. For more information, contact Electronic Arts at (415) 571-7171. One warning: If you hear an incoming shell, duck.

EA ACQUIRES ORIGIN

In a deal announced September 10 and valued at approximately $35 million, Electronic Arts acquired Origin Systems. EA traded approximately 1.3 million shares for all outstanding Origin securities, and both companies described the agreement as "a pooling of interests." According to statements from the two parties, EA is looking for a kickstart in the CD-ROM business, while Origin Systems is looking to EA for a larger power base and help with its international and multi-platform development. **— C.C.**

GOOD FOR YOUR HEAD

The Waterford Institute has released **Mental Math Games**, a new educational program featuring 256-color animation and supporting all major PC sound cards. Mental Math introduces players to a sequence of 355 essential arithmetic skills, ranging from single-digit addition to triple-digit multiplication.

In each of five games, players solve randomly generated math problems from the chosen skill level, answering fast and accurately to receive high scores. Brøderbund is the exclusive North American distributor; for more information, call (415) 382-4400.

Space Adventure ($79.95), fourth in the *Knowledge Adventure Interactive Books* series and produced in collaboration with astronaut Buzz Aldrin, uses full-motion color video, simulations, and stereo sound to look at the human and robotic exploration of space and the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

Designed for children aged 5 and over (as well as adults), the product uses a custom "hyperlink" system that lets you chart your own course through space. Hundreds of photo-quality images let you explore any aspect of a given slide, whether picture or text, by clicking on that item.

For more information, contact Knowledge Adventure at (818) 542-4200. ❑

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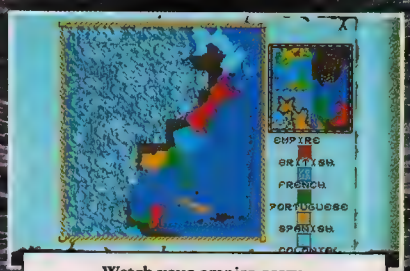

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Impressions

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TOP GUN

REALITY CHECK

Forget the physics — the real thing's too hard to handle.

By Cameron Crotty

I like steak — a lot. I like thick, rare T-bones fresh off the grill, steak kabobs, steak and eggs, steak and potatoes, steak teriyaki, even steak tartare.

But force me to eat steak every night for the rest of my life, and within the month I'd run screaming to the nearest vegetarian monastery.

What does steak have to do with flight simulators? Well, apart from the fact that they're two sure-fire indicators that you're dealing with a Real Man (*unk, grunt, snort*), a steady diet of either is bad for both health and sanity.

So take a break from carnivorous habits and try a different dish. Say goodbye to Arab and Russian enemies, and say hello to Kilrathi and Sirians.

IN THE BEGINNING

Until recently, there's been only one way for flight-sim fans to kick butt in the big vacuum in the sky — Origin's **Wing Commander** series, combining stellar (pun intended) graphics, a believable storyline, and reasonably realistic flight mechanics.

Wing Commander now has a challenger: MicroProse's **Mantis Experimental Fighter**, another sim that tries to break out of the shoot-'em-up-in-space arcade mold. (Check out "Paraprose or Microgon?" in this issue's Game Preserve, p. 6.)

Like Wing Commander, Mantis drops you in the middle of an interstellar war, but there the resemblance ends. Where Wing Commander features bitmapped graphics and realistic cartoon animation, Mantis relies on polygon objects for its combat sequences, and rendered or digitized objects for most of its cinematic storyline interludes.

PHYSICS 101

The differences between the two extend to the approach they take to simulating space flight and combat.

As any high-school physics student knows, terrestrial aircraft must combat gravity with wings designed to create *lift*.

In addition, the earth's atmosphere creates friction, or *drag*, which slows a plane down immediately if *thrust* isn't applied continually.

There's no atmosphere in space, of course, and thus no drag or lift. Neither of these games forces a pilot to contend with gravity, so the only physics phenomena that matter are thrust and *inertia*. Theoretically, if you fire up your engines in space and then turn them off, you'll keep going until you hit something. If you light 'em up and don't turn 'em off, you'll accelerate until you run out of fuel.

Unfortunately for Buck Rogers wannabes, real-life physics and movie-style dogfighting don't mix.

For instance, when the *Battlestar Galactica* guys go zipping around, you never see maneuvering jets flare out of the sides of their inexplicably aerodynamic Vipers, or see them sliding sideways through space until they can compensate for inertia.

Like TV and movie producers, space-sim programmers have two basic choices: They can make it familiar, or they can make it real.

YOU SAY TOMATO . . .

The designers at Origin chose to make Wing Commander familiar — flying a Wing Commander ship feels like flying an airplane. You set your speed and point your nose where you want to go.

Your computer keeps you from going too fast, and some unexplained system (retro-rockets?) lets you decelerate without turning your ship around and using the main engines. You have to deal with inertia, but only peripherally — more as a handicap that keeps you from turning as fast as you'd like. You don't have to worry about spending time decelerating and trying to work your way back to the battle.

In Mantis, though, sailing in one side of a dogfight and out the other is a definite possibility. Traveling between point A and point B involves accelerating to your cruise speed, cruising powerless for a while, then turning your ship 180 degrees and using your main thrusters to slow down.

Flying the Mantis craft requires spending a fair amount of time butt-first, trying to change direction. Manually maintaining a bead on a target that's moving in a different direction and at a different velocity is almost impossible. To counter this, Mantis gives you a computer autopilot. The result is that you spend most of your time pointing out targets and telling your ship "Go."

WHAT NOW?

Which approach is more realistic? Probably Mantis'. Which approach is more fun? Well, let's just say that after two or three days of flying backwards past giggling Sirians, I threw up my hands in disgust and dove right back into Wing Commander II and the war against the Kilrathi. Maybe there's such a thing as *too* much reality. ❑

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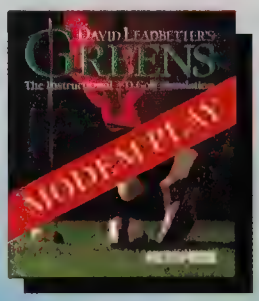

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ROLE CALL

IN THE PITS

Take a vacation from the holidays — visit a deep, dark, dank dungeon.

By Bernie Yee

Christmas is around the corner, and Santa's elves — dwarves, fairies, and halflings, too — have all been working hard on some new role-playing releases. Some you may have heard of, others may be new (and news) to you. But they represent a role-playing kind of holiday cheer that could end up on your hard-disk drive by the time 1992 fades away.

GET OUT YOUR CHECKBOOK

Barring any unforeseen disasters, games like **Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen**, **Lord of the Rings: Volume 2** (both essentially revamps of their predecessors), and **Crusaders of the Dark Savant** (our Editors' Choice this month, p. 96) will be available to satisfy your fantasy appetite.

Crusaders should keep you especially busy this winter, for it's a big world full of surprises. Some of my fellow gamers have been through the game more than six times using its various beginnings.

But these big-name games aren't the only things on the Christmas menu. Here's a sneak peek at some of the other interesting wares heading your way. (Writing a column for *PCGames* does have its advantages.)

TAKE THE PLUNGE

Interplay has officially revived **Mean Time**, the "sequel" to Wasteland. Based on Wasteland's engine — but adapted to 16-bit capabilities — Mean Time is a time-travel adventure that's been started and scrapped several times.

Now Interplay is taking the plunge, rewriting the combat system and going ahead with its release. No word on when, but we can only hope that this game recaptures that Wasteland feeling.

SSI has, thank goodness, retired the *Gold Box* engine, and in its place has introduced the **Dark Sun** system. Mucking around the alpha version reveals a few things, the most obvious being that SSI isn't out to dazzle you, but instead to provide a solid framework on which to hang a thriving AD&D line. It looks like the company's succeeded with Dark Sun.

Graphics images are excellent, reminiscent of the isometric display SSI unveiled in a primitive form in Shadow Sorcerer. Dark Sun takes place in a world where magic has a price — it saps the life out of the land. The game uses AD&D *2d Edition* rules, and introduces several new character classes, from *Druids* to *Gladiators*. Its images will remind you of the adventures you see on the Sega Genesis videogame machine.

SSI's point-and-click interface works much like the vaunted Sierra icon control system; click on the right button and the point cycles through various options such as *talk*, *use*, *look*, and *move*.

The new engine is object-oriented, which means you should be able to point-and-click on screen and examine or otherwise manipulate various items. In fact, the engine as a whole works remarkably like the high-tech Ultima. The combination of AD&D license and improved software technology should make this new series popular.

THE REAL THING

Origin is quick on the heels of its Ultima Underworld success with **Underworld 2**, tentatively titled **Labyrinth of Worlds**. The graphics images have been improved to provide a larger gaming window and more-detailed texture maps. Look for improved handling of sound effects as well.

The Underworld designers have put together a more-compelling plot line for this sequel, and Origin is busy moving its concept of gaming "realism" from Ultima VII to the Underworld universe (perhaps because the latter has reportedly outsold Ultima VII). Underworld 2 should shape up to be at least three times larger than its famous ground-breaking predecessor.

Preliminary looks also indicate that the company took players' comments and criticisms to heart and addressed them. So although Underworld 2 won't depart radically from its ancestor, it will refine today's best graphical role-playing engine.

LOOKING AHEAD

Looking Glass Software, creators of Underworld, isn't resting after this project, either. A science-fiction role-playing game is in the works, as well as possible plans to take Underworld out of the dungeon and into the real world. Nor are CD-ROM-based games out of the picture.

Meanwhile, other RPG developers are busy working on their own new systems, almost all based on a real-time 3-D environment. A few companies are playing it so close to the vest that no one knows exactly what's happening.

That means we're in for a new year of bright promises, release delays, wild bombs, pesky bugs, and, most gratifying, some knockouts. Stay tuned. ❑

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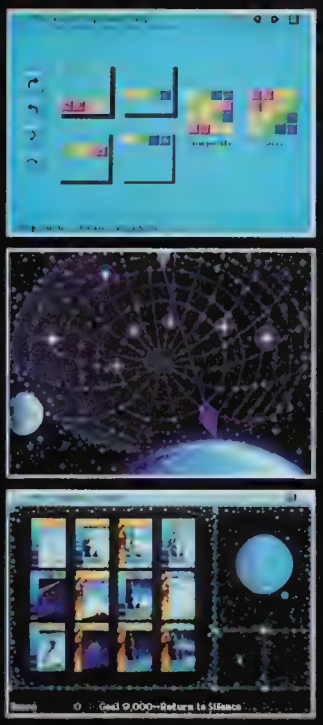

Once you've ventured past these levels, a fourth awaits. Beckoning you to combine the skills of reason, spatial relation and balance you've acquired into 108 new and electrifying challenges called The Pilgrimage.

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SPORTS PAGE

FIELD OF DREAMS

Could Ali take Tyson? Could Ruth hit Ryan's fastball? PC sports games have the answers.

By Wayne Kawamoto

Count these among the things I'd love to see: Mohammed Ali gives Mike Tyson a boxing lesson in the school of hard knocks; Whitey Ford goes head to head with Roger Clemens in a take-no-prisoners pitching battle; the '27 Yankees play the Big Red Machine; the '70s Steelers line up against the '80s Niners.

And while we're at it, let's see Godzilla wrestle King Kong.

THE BAMBINO TAKES ON RYAN

All these scenarios — except that last one — can happen on your PC. Statistical sports simulations can take athletes, even teams, from different eras, then match them in impossible and improbable fantasy games. It's one of the things only the PC can do.

SSI's **Tony La Russa's Ultimate Baseball**, **MicroLeague Baseball IV**, Lance Haffner's **Technical Knockout**, and **MicroLeague Football** bring together teams and athletes from the past and present on a digitized field of dreams. (Program it, and they will play.)

Historical matches are a lot of fun, but they raise almost as many questions as provide answers.

Could Lou Gehrig or Babe Ruth hit a major-league ball thrown in 1992? Could Rocky Marciano last in the ring with Larry Holmes?

With today's high-tech training, it's hard to say. For instance, witness this year's Olympics, just the latest example of athletes continuing to jump higher, run faster, and swim stronger than their predecessors.

On the other hand, you can't ignore raw talent. Babe Ruth may not have faced Nolan Ryan-style fastballs, but if the Bambino had been born 20 years ago, he might well be the game's dominant player (though he'd have to deal with Steinbrenner).

Also at issue are those biases that computer simulations bring into their projections. It isn't unusual to find baseball games that are pitching dominant, for example, just as controversy always surrounds player ratings.

Let's put these simulations' money where their mouths are. Let's see what they say.

LEAGUES OF YOUR OWN

SSI's Tony La Russa's Ultimate Baseball (reviewed in December 1991, p. 88) blends its strong statistical basis with physics and some optional arcade action. Ultimate Baseball's add-on disk offers 26 great teams of the past, including such notables as the '27 Yankees and the '19 Black Sox.

I put all 26 teams through an entire season and let Ultimate Baseball manage and play the games. The winner, according to La Russa? The 1961 Yankees, the team of Maris and Mantle.

MicroLeague Baseball IV (MLB4) and MicroLeague Football are the latest additions to this widely known statistical series. MicroLeague games concentrate solely on team management, eschewing arcade elements.

In MLB4 (reviewed in this issue, p. 52), I set up a league that included such greats as the '55 Dodgers, the '76 Reds, the '78 Dodgers, and the '79 Pirates. MicroLeague played a season, and chose a winner: Sparky Anderson's 1976 Big Red Machine.

For a pigskin pick, I asked MicroLeague Football (see Game Preserve, November 1991, p. 9) to play a season, again using terrific teams like the '77 Cowboys, the '66 Packers, and the '86 Broncos. The winner and Super Bowl champ of all time? The 1975 Steelers.

Technical Knockout, by Lance Haffner Games, may not put pretty pictures on screen, but it does give you a blow-by-blow commentary of the bout. Think of it as radio on your PC — your imagination creates all the action.

Technical Knockout lets you match up 600 boxers (200 active contenders and 400 retired). You can determine at what point in the boxer's career you want him to fight, and the game lets you set between-round strategies and prefight conditioning. It's all here, from the gory cuts to judging.

Since boxers rarely meet more than a few times in a career, it's interesting to run, say, ten fights to see whether the outcome on the average differs from the historical record.

And, of course, you can put boxers from different decades in the same ring, something not even Don King can do.

Lance Haffner ran a match-up between Mohammed Ali (in his prime) and Mike Tyson. The scorecard? Ali won on a TKO in the fifth round. In this simulated bout, Tyson, although plenty aggressive, never found Ali.

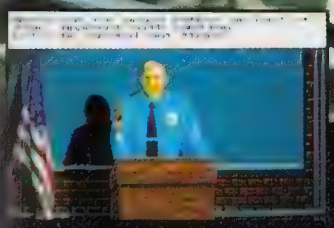
PC MAGIC

At oldtimers games, past legends come together to relive old memories and fading glories. But they can't turn back the clock or return to the days of their prime.

Only the PC can trick time, make fantasy a reality, and let you put together a league of your own. ❑

HILL STREET BLUES

THE COMPUTER GAME



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YOU ARE THERE

IN THE THICK OF IT

You are there when tiny men roam the PC's battlefields.

By Peter Olafson

I hear the patter of little feet. A plague of tiny men bearing weapons has descended upon my computer. They're sitting around campfires making nasty tiny-man plans. They're peeking through tiny man-made ramparts and firing tiny flaming boulders. They're in my face, and I think they've got catapults and boiling oil.

We're witnessing one of the computer-game industry's periodic lemming-like surges — this time toward the animated war game.

The last six months have witnessed the release of **PowerMonger** (Electronic Arts), **Siege** (Mindcraft), **Realms** (Virgin), and **Mega-Lo-Mania** (UbiSoft).

Lord knows what's waiting in the wings.

MAYBE WE'RE HERE, MAYBE WE'RE NOT

Animation in war games is neither exactly new — remember Cinemaware's **Lords of the Rising Sun** and EA's **Centurion**? — nor strictly necessary.

It's usually considered a nice little extra, much like VGA support or an LAPC-1 score — something that adds color rather than substance to tactical combat.

Technically speaking, it's just as "realistic" to designate an on-screen counter or even a bland *X* to represent a particular group of soldiers, give it a destination, and (barring acts of artificial intelligence) permit it to reappear at the appointed place at the appointed time.

So what's wrong with still-life war? For one thing, it's not nearly as much fun.

Second, it's a lot less personal. I've never mourned an *X* or a counter on the screen, but when I lost my right-hand man in PowerMonger, I got downright depressed.

Animation doesn't add something automatically to a war game, of course. Some games give you the distinct sense that when a particular hex is out of your sight, it's out of the computer's mind. When you do zoom in, what's displayed is more a play acted for your benefit than something you've simply stumbled upon.

That just reinforces the perception that the computer game is only an elaborate facade, not a window on a simulated world. The game isn't doing its job.

Now PowerMonger could change all that. (See PCG Reviews, November 1992, p. 58, for details.) This long-awaited conversion from the Amiga is the first war game set in an open-ended environment. How open? I could tell you stories. In fact, why not?

I'd sent out a force to take control of a yellow-owned village, then zoomed the view out to watch its progress.

Not quite halfway there, I spotted a flicker of movement — too distinct to be a bird or a rogue sheep — among trees to the southeast. Zoom in.

Sure enough, it was a yellow army, larger than my own, but slightly strung out and moving swiftly toward the town my force had just left.

I wasn't high on my prospects for victory — the enemy force was half again bigger than mine — so I paused for them to pass, wheeled smartly left, stormed over the hill, surprised the rear guard, decimated it, then cut up the stragglers as they arrived on the battlefield.

The hill was literally covered with bodies and, after a time, burned-out campfires, food caches, boats, and bows.

YOU ARE THERE

By the same token, it's utterly beguiling to come home and find life in PowerMonger proceeding apace out of your direct view — farmers tilling fields, fishermen rowing their boats, shepherds tending their flocks, and so on. They're there when I look for them, and it feels as though they're there when I don't.

Realms and Mega-Lo-Mania, by contrast, may be good, entertaining games, but they use animation differently, almost incidentally — and certainly less effectively.

In Mega-Lo-Mania, for instance, troops literally zap to their destination territory, where they mill about as if attending some colossal combination cocktail party and archery contest.

Realms does have PowerMonger's broad landscape, but the game is intensely structured. Urban affairs are all dealt with in the abstract. Each army is represented by a single unit, and battles are all fought on a standard square field. If they put up ropes and sold tickets, you could have a boxing match.

Siege (for a review see "Generals Wanted" in the November 1992 issue, p. 28) has the most in common with PowerMonger, but on a smaller scale: the defense or conquest of a castle. Real-time combat here means real-world emotions, from the collapsing sensation of a rushed retreat against impossible odds to the shameful joy of sallying forth from the castle gates to rout a goblin horde with a rain of arrows.

God, that was fun. I was right there with them. ❑

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CHILD'S PLAY

MIND GAMES

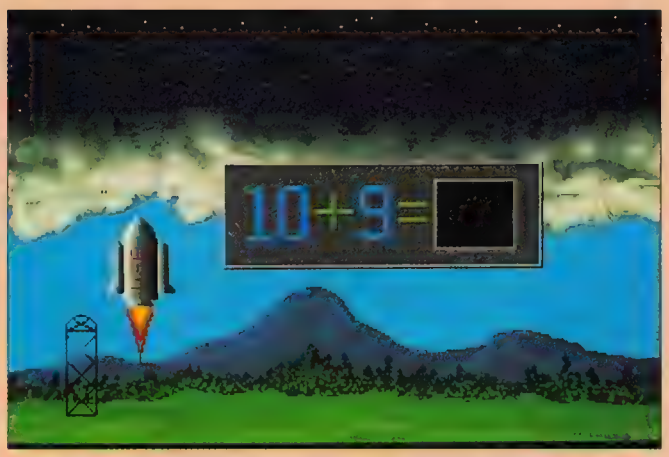
When it knows its place, drill-and-practice software has a place on the PC.

By Gregg Keizer

If assembly-line work and mindless filing are what drive adults nuts on the job, their kids' counterparts must be drill-and-practice at school. Repetitive work is — let's put it plainly — *boring*. Dreary. Depressing. But hey, it's a job.

Like a tedious task at work, things like multiplication tables, spelling lists, and memorizing important dates are a necessary evil in the classroom. Without a foundation in basic facts — and that's what drill-and-practice is all about, drumming those facts into kids' heads so hard they never leave — it's tough to move on to more-creative work, like problem solving, writing, or historical exploration.

Drill-and-practice education came naturally to the computer, for the repetition could be automated easily. The computer (and before that, the more-primitive teaching machine) was forever patient, tossed up the same problem the same way to countless kids (or to the same kid countless times, if that's what it took), and always, always knew the right answer.



Mental Math Games: Drill excels at teaching the basics.

Along the way, though, drill-and-practice ware got damned for what it was. The press in particular — this magazine, this writer among them — pushed for interactive, open-ended educational experiences that could compete with Nintendo and TV for kids' time and attention. Drill got a bad name — an undeserved bad name.

There's a place for drill-and-practice software, an important place, in both the classroom and the home. You just have to find the drill-and-practice software that knows its place.

Some learning must, almost by definition, be done in a drill-and-practice setting — early arithmetic, for one. Although children often first learn arithmetic by counting objects (fingers included), there quickly comes a point where they must simply *know* that 5 + 13 is 18, that 29 – 9 is 20, that 6 x 6 is 36, and that 72/6 is 12. The only way children can learn rote is in a rote way — memorizing.

Some people call this *mental math*, a term signifying that the results are already there, in place and ready to use. Kids develop mental-math skills through — you guessed it — practice and drill. Flashcards, timed tests, and shout-out-the-answer games are just some of the methods teachers apply. Or kids can try their hand at the Waterford Institute's **Mental Math Games** (distributed by Broderbund Software), a drill-and-practice program that more than most knows its place. (See this issue's Game Preserve, p. 10.)

Mental Math doesn't try to pretend to be something it ain't. It knows it's drill-and-practice; it knows it's not something kids will turn to instead of television. Even so, Mental Math is a terrific example of good kids' software.

Mental Math Games does one thing, and it does it well. It hones basic addition and subtraction skills, and tosses in a bit of multiplication and division. No counting cute objects on screen, no 2-oranges-then-3-oranges animation — just lots of timed problems to force kids to answer quickly.

The program lays a veneer of fun atop the work — some of the problems appear on ducks that fall when the right answer's typed in, or a moon-bound rocket makes it a bit further off the pad with each correct response — but the core of Mental Math is as black-and-white as 1 + 5 = 6.

Stripped to its essentials, Mental Math Games is a huge electronic worksheet-cum-flashcard; its combination of endless problems (and thus endless practice) and work-under-pressure keeps at kids long after a teacher would have fallen to the floor, tired of it all.

Not many subjects really demand drill-and-practice — another that comes to mind is spelling, where kids have to know, *right now*, whether a word's right or wrong just by looking at it — but for those that do, the computer continues to be an important teaching tool.

Don't brush off drill just because some reviewer pans it. Just know what works with drill, drill, drill, and what doesn't. And know it has a place on the PC. ❑

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PERIPHERAL VISION

MEMORY CRUNCH

PCGames *presents a guide to fighting back against big titles that hog RAM.*

By Barry Brenesal

There's no doubt that computer games set software trends. Games often march where other programs fear to tread.

One of the latest trends on the PC, even among games, is a move toward galloping memory consumption. Origin Systems is a pioneer here, as evidenced by **Ultima Underworld**, which demands 2 megabytes of extended memory and even supplies its own memory manager to process it. (See "In the Pits," this month's Role Call column, p. 14, and Game Preserve, p. 6 in this issue, for a first look at **Labyrinth of Worlds**, the second Underworld installment.)

If the trend continues, it won't be long before games reach a critical mass. In a not-too-distant future, some games will not only require every byte of memory your chips can muster, but will start absorbing your microprocessor, too. They'll suck your PC through a dimensionless point into some alternate universe, leaving behind only the single most useless part of all, the internal PC speaker.

But things needn't reach such a dismal point. With a little effort and common sense, you can deal with today's memory crunchers.

EVERY BYTE COUNTS

Let's start with games that require about 595K of free memory and demand a mouse. Mindcraft's **Siege** is a good example. (See the feature "Generals Wanted," November 1992, p. 28, and "In the Thick of It," this month's You Are There column, p. 18.) Most mouse device drivers take up 10K to 12K, enough to draw many a PC's memory down below a game's threshold.

Fortunately, you've got *memory managers* like Quarterdeck's **QEMM** and Qualitas' **386MAX**, which can move memory-resident programs and device drivers (such as a mouse driver) out of the lower range of random-access memory (everything below the 640K mark), and into the part of RAM that lies between 640K and 1024K.

It's not empty up there, but there are usually a lot of small "holes." QEMM and 386MAX can reorganize all those small pieces of memory into a few larger ones, which can in turn hold programs and drivers as large as 40K to 50K.

When a mouse driver is loaded high in this manner, it vanishes from conventional memory. But just remember to remove the device driver from your CONFIG.SYS file and then reboot before you run Microsoft Windows. (Windows has its own mouse driver, and the combination of the two drivers in memory can sometimes present compatibility problems.)

STUFF IT

Another useful piece of software you might want to load high is a *disk cache*. A disk cache keeps a program's most frequently accessed code in active memory, where it loads up to ten times faster than a file drawn from your hard-disk drive.

If you can spare it, give a good disk cache (such as Hyperware's **Hyperdisk**) 2 megabytes of expanded or extended memory to keep large-sized data files available quickly. You'll be surprised and pleased at the improvement.

A cache will also cut back on your memory consumption indirectly. You'll be able to reduce buffers in your CONFIG.SYS from 15 or more to only three. (DOS buffers are in fact a primitive kind of cache, long surpassed by other products.) Because each buffer takes up roughly .5K of memory, that frees up some 6K.

A very few games, however — notably several from Interplay, including **BattleChess** and **Castles** — actually need those buffers. They'll run more slowly — and eventually freeze up — if you substitute a cache.

While we're on the subject of CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files, go through both before running a memory-hogging game. Remove any device drivers and memory-resident programs you won't need during play, then reboot. Alternatively, you can add a REM statement to the front of the line if you're using DOS 5.0.

Here's the point: You'll not only leave more memory free for your game, but you'll also remove the most common cause of memory conflicts.

Remember, too, that you can often free up extra memory by settling for a lower video resolution. Some card and tile games, such as Electronic Arts' **Hong Kong Majong Pro** (reviewed in this issue, p. 66), look fine in EGA. As a side benefit, you'll find they load faster.

This solution extends to other gaming options, as well. (Each game comes with its own instructions on how to "force"-load a specific video mode.) Disabling sound may also lower a game's memory requirements, sometimes by as much as 30K.

The next time your new game throws that *Insufficient Memory* message at you, use the hints we've talked about here to appease the RAM gods. ❑

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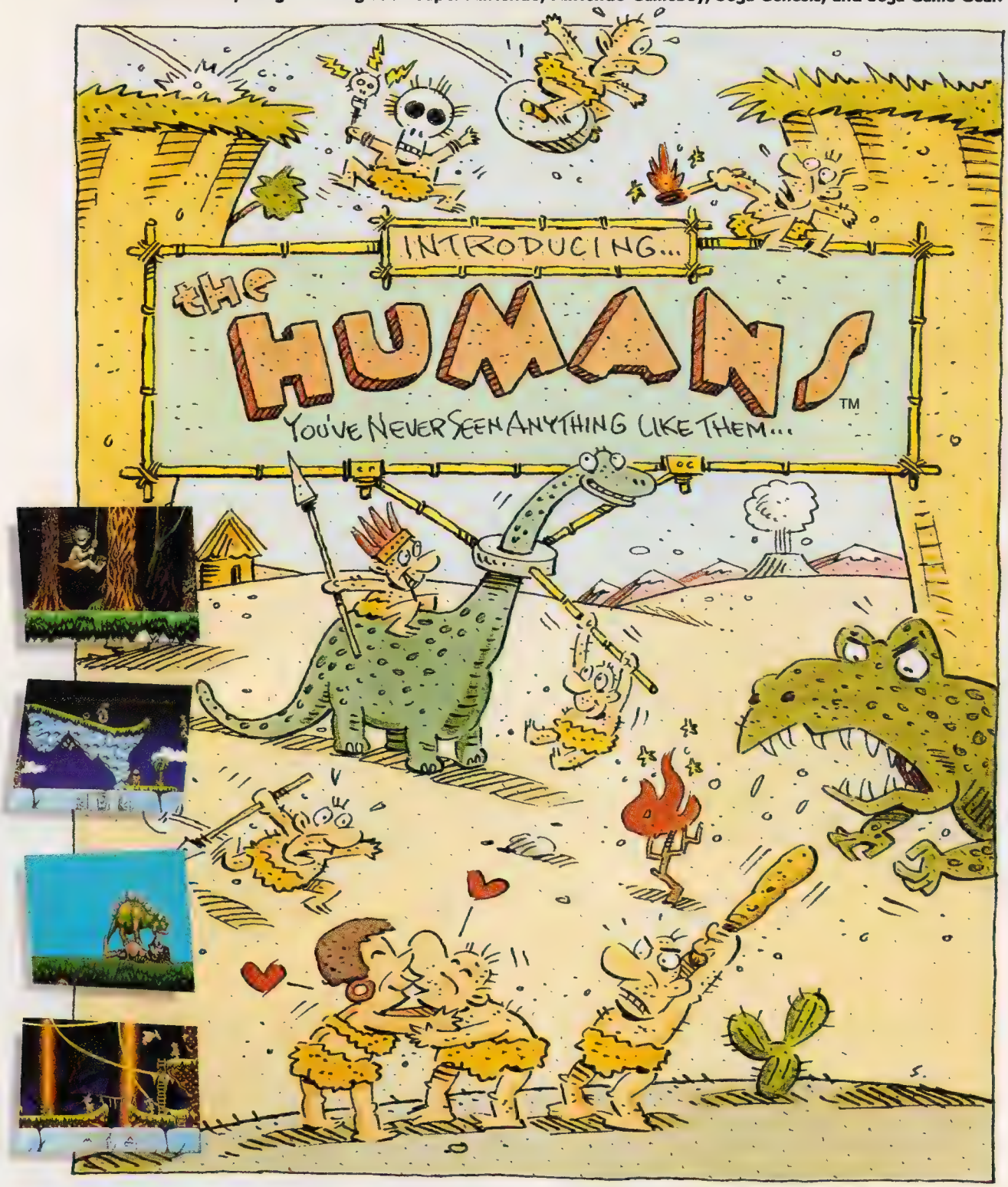

EVOLUTION...To paraphrase Darwin, it's the survival of the hippest. One wrong move and you're dino-meat, one wrong step and you're a fossil, one fashion faux-pas and you're the laughing stock of the gene pool, baby. Discover tools, survive and multiply or these HUMANS are a time-line footnote. In this world of chaos and carnivores...

...Keep the tribe alive.

GAMETEK

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MULTIMEDIA MAGIC

CD-ROM conjures up new experiences in sight and sound.

If *supernatural* means the stuff beyond the pale of day-to-day, multimedia is indeed spooky. Compared to the usual range of daily electronic entertainment — stereo to TV to Nintendo to the PC — multimedia is magic.

Not the CD-ROM drive, the technological trick behind multimedia is sleight of hand, that makes this magic possible. The compact disc's advantage of enormous storage space is what makes enhanced multimedia games and learning titles feasible.

The single greatest advantage of CD-ROM-based games over their floppy ancestors is sound. Whether that sound is fabulous stereo music, native-language tutors, character-developing voices, ongoing narrative, spoken instructions, or simply stunning sound effects, the compact disc has no peer. With almost 700 megabytes of storage space, lengthy sound and music collections can be packed on one convenient piece of plastic; even better, extensive libraries of still and animated images can be put on a compact disc, too, enriching game characters or creating photorealistic playgrounds. Put it all together, stir in the interactive possibilities that all games offer, and you've got some hot stuff.

Once you get past these intrinsic improvements to computer games, you can start looking for the side benefits. No copy protection is one, so you needn't paw through the manual looking for a clue or spin a decoder wheel like some '50s kid with a new box of breakfast cereal. There's no need to delete games, then re-install them back onto your poor, jam-packed hard drive each time you want to play. (That's no joke — not even when you have an 80-megabyte hard drive, not when games typically take up 5 or more megabytes, with some monsters past the 20-megabyte mark.) The CD-ROM drive is virtual — just pop in another of those big beasts. And when you're not playing games, slip in an audio CD and rock 'n' roll to your favorite music. It *is* magic.

IS THERE A RABBIT IN THAT HAT?

Although the list is still a comparatively short one, dozens of CD games are currently available. We'll take a spin though a few of the choices, and offer some more in the accompanying sidebar, "Abracadabra." These five CD-ROM games represent some of the best multimedia magic going, and sample a variety of PC entertainment genres, such as adventure, strategy, mystery, discovery, and board games.

BY TOM CARLTON PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANA SIGALL

Our first trick is **Loom: A Fantasy Adventure**, a full-voice CD "talkie" with splendid stereo music and sound. High-resolution, 256-color, three-dimensional graphics images set the backdrop for this adventure. Further enhanced with LucasArts' panoramic cinematic technology, luxurious landscapes with craggy, misty mountains pan across your video screen like a scene from *Star Wars*.

This intricately designed story is filled with fantastic characters and challenging puzzles. You assist young Bobbin Threadbare in weaving a story from a plethora of threads, while at the same time unraveling some mysteries. Born in the mystic land of Great Guilds, Bobbin Threadbare must confront the Coming of the Third Shadow. His mother, Lady Cygna, was banished from Loom Island for using the loom to bring forth this new child. Born not of flesh but of the loom, he was rejected by the Guild of Weavers.

Bobbin's guild possesses remarkable weaving powers that transcend the limits of physical cloth. Healing powers, seeing in the dark, exchanging one's reflection with another, invisibility, spinning straw into gold, and casting terror into the hearts of enemies are just a few. Bobbin must learn to weave that fabric of life. Hetchel, his mother's closest friend, surreptitiously teaches Bobbin the rudimentary ways of Loom. With these powers, Bobbin begins his adventure, sailing to the Mainland, where devastating dragons rule the twilight sky and where legions of dead rise from the grave. You must help Bobbin figure out the reason strange powers swept away the Guild of Weavers, then rescue the Guild and save the universe from an unspeakable catastrophe.

Unlike other adventure games, Loom doesn't depend on tedious mapping or the collection of objects. Instead, you learn a vocabulary of musical notes, called threads — *Throw*, *Beat*, *Treadle*, and *Rest* — that are set on a musical scale. You select four notes from the vocabulary and spin musical drafts into threads of influence. Bobbin and you must learn to use

ABRACADABRA: TEN MORE MULTIMEDIA SPELLBINDERS

You don't own a multimedia-ready PC? Then you're missing out on a world of adventure, travel, entertainment, education, and a host of productivity tools. This short list of compact discs offers a glimpse into the world of multimedia for PC users, and should be more than enough to motivate you to move to the magic.

• ANNABEL'S DREAM OF ANCIENT EGYPT (MPC Windows, $85) is a delightful adventure into the desert lands of the Pharaohs, with music from Verdi (Aida) and prose by Kipling. It contains a collection of games similar to Scrabble and Concentration, as well as a coloring book and paper projects. For details contact Texas Caviar at 3933 Spicewood Springs Road, Austin, TX 78759, (512) 346-7887.

• AMERICAN VISTA (MPC Windows, $79.95) lets you discover America with a dynamic multimedia atlas that gives a sense of the diversity of the U.S. through facts, articles, folk music, dialects, and a variety of maps and historical documents. For more information contact Applied Optical Media Corp. at 1450 Boot Road, West Chester, PA 19380, (215) 429-3701.

• BATTLECHESS (MPC Windows, $79.95) makes chess more fun and combative than you could imagine. You use a 3-D chess board that features animated pieces that battle, and each move is accompanied by striking sound effects. The extensive tutorial is a class act. For details contact Interplay Productions at 3710 South Susan, Santa Ana, CA 92704, (714) 545-9001.

• MACMILLAN DICTIONARY FOR CHILDREN (MPC Windows, $59.95) is an electronic version of America's best-selling dictionary. It includes thousands of definitions enhanced by sound and animation, as well as interactive learning games. For more information contact Macmillan New Media at 124 Mt. Auburn St., Cambridge, MA 02138, (617) 661-2955.

• MAVIS BEACON TEACHES TYPING (MPC Windows, $99.95) incorporates verbal dictation; audio analysis of your progress; voice-based demonstrations, announcements, and help; and music. For details contact Software Toolworks at 60 Leveroni Court, Novato, CA 94949, (415) 883-3000.

• MICROSOFT WORKS FOR WINDOWS (MPC Windows, $199) is a multimedia version of the popular business package that includes a word processor, spreadsheet, charting tool, database, and drawing tool. The animated audio tutorial offers a great way to learn this application and basic computer skills. Contact Microsoft Corp. at 1 Microsoft Way, Redmond, WA 98052, (800) 426-9400.

• SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE (DOS, $99.95) puts you in the pilot's seat for WWII combat and lets you re-enact the fierce air battles between the 8th Air Force and the German Luftwaffe. Includes several futuristic Nazi planes, many of which never left the testing stage. For more information contact LucasArts at Box 10307, San Rafael, CA 94912, (415) 721-3300.

• SPACE QUEST IV (MPC Windows/DOS, $69.95) sports over 100 hand-painted 256-color backgrounds, which set the stage for Roger Wilco's adventure through time and space. Realistic animation and a fully orchestrated soundtrack enhance your adventures. For details contact Sierra On-Line at Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (209) 683-4468.

• TOTAL BASEBALL (DOS, $69.95) is the most comprehensive baseball reference ever compiled. It includes a complete history from 1871 to the 1991 World Series, as well as statistics for more than 13,000 players, with sound clips and 500 images. For details contact CMC at 514 NW 11th Ave., Portland, OR 97209, (503) 241-4351.

• WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? DELUXE (DOS, $89.95) is dynamite. Carmen explodes onto your screen with a host of new characters, locations, stereo music, and animation. It's mystery, intrigue, and physical and cultural geography at its best. For details contact Broderbund Software at 500 Redwood Blvd., Novato, CA 94948, (800) 521-6263. — T.C.

this musical magic and acquire new notes throughout the course of the game.

Don't be surprised if it takes a while to catch on to this style of play before you really begin to appreciate this game. And appreciate you will. You'll enjoy the variety of musical themes and the professional cast of character voices that are available only from a game developer associated with a movie company such as LucasFilms. Enjoy the intrinsic plot, the splendid graphics, the rich variety of dialects in this full-voice and text-rich narrative. Even enjoy the companion audio CD that holds a half-hour drama about Loom. Loom sets a new standard in CD-based multimedia gaming. It's beyond everyday experiences; it's supernatural.

Loom: A Fantasy Adventure is filled with amazing characters, challenging puzzles, splendid graphics images, and rich sound.

TALK THE TALK

Introductory Games in Spanish from Syracuse Language Systems remains the most thoughtful and imaginative way to learn Spanish (short of immersing yourself in a Hispanic culture, that is.) Additional games are available in French and English.

In fact, to say Introductory Games offers a great way to learn a language isn't quite right. Instead, you *acquire* a foreign language by playing 27 different games. No reading, no writing — just spoken language. These are not lessons, but games that offer several levels of difficulty. Its design is the best of all worlds. The clean, simple, pictorial interface offers no distractions, and its content is thoughtful and clearly constructed with the insight of an educator.

Syracuse Language Systems has organized these 27 games into three menus, each offering nine games. In the first set you play with a variety of objects to learn colors, shapes, common clothing, facial anatomy, farm and wild animals, and an assortment of action verbs. *Menu 2* — more challenging, with disappearing objects and sequential memory games — encourages you to listen to word strings that have subjects such as transportation, food and drink, and numbers. The third menu reviews all vocabulary from the previous games in a more-traditional board-game style. There are games and more games, from *Simon Says* and *Concentration* to jigsaw puzzles and bingo.

The beginning games start out simple and progress to higher levels. A graphical menu fills your screen with a grid of nine boxes, each containing an object or a scene. A native speaker asks you to choose a game. Click on the picture of farm animals, for instance, and the screen changes to present the animals in a series of boxes. With another click, a native speaker says the name of the animal. Once you've listened to all the names, you can repeat them if you like, or click on the button at the bottom to continue to the next level. Now the screen shows all the animals in a barnyard setting, while the talking tutor asks you to find the horse, the hen, the cow, and so on. Each time you select the correct answer, the native speaker rewards you with language-appropriate encouragement: *excellent, correcto, fantastique*.

Chessmaster 3000's graphics offer several options including a variety of board sizes and textures.

Play these entertaining games by yourself, or let the whole family play together. My 6-year-old daughter found Introductory Games in Spanish easy to use. She frequently spends half an hour, or more, totally taken with the games. Adults are no different. They can't keep their hands off the mouse.

I've yet to find anyone unimpressed. The English version is ideal for young kids eager to learn new vocabulary. But watch out, they get hooked: Viva la multimedia.

PAWN TO KING'S KNIGHT 2

The Software Toolworks bills **The Chessmaster 3000** as the finest chess program around. Whether you're a beginning, intermediate, or advanced

player, that marketing hype is probably true. (It can't beat Interplay's BattleChess for sheer creativity and multimedia entertainment, though.) If you want to learn more about the game and become a stronger player, then Chessmaster can't be beat.

The Chessmaster 3000 CD-ROM version takes advantage of the Windows MPC (*multimedia personal computer*) environment. It offers an amazing array of options for using audio, animation, and windows.

Its audio track provides spoken information about each move during a game, or extensive narration for learning the basic chess rules from the Mentor. If you need or want advice, Chessmaster's pleasant-sounding voice describes the recommended move, while the corresponding 3-D chess piece moves in a demonstration. You may select *Analysis* of the next moves for both sides. The game fails to offer the same audio for its excellent collection of tutorials, however. If you prefer, as each piece moves you can listen to orchestral snippets in place of narration. You may find it annoying, as I did, and prefer the Chessmaster's voice or no sound at all.

Don't expect to see developed characters with personalities as in BattleChess. Animation is limited to the movement of pieces on the board. Chessmaster uses animation effectively to demonstrate basic moves, provide tutorial lesions, give advice with analysis, challenge your opening moves, and develop strategic thinking. The graphics images may not make the best use of animation, but they do include an amazing variety of options, including multiple perspectives when you tilt your 3-D board. You can pick from three board sizes, select colors or wood and marble textures, and choose one of four styles of chess pieces.

And unlike some other Windows games, Chessmaster really takes advantage of the graphical interface. Besides its variety of perspectives, Chessmaster opens eight more windows to provide, among other things, a clock, a list of legal moves, game status, and an annotation window for written or auditory notes. These aids are helpful, even if you have a photographic memory that's 20 moves deep.

Chessmaster's extended features may blow your mind. You can, for instance, modify your computerized opponent's personality; select from a variety of controls for time or depth of thinking; or play blindfold, championship, or tournament games with up to ten individual human or computer challengers. This CD is indeed a master at chess.

HEY THERE, LITTLE CRITTER

Broderbund calls **Just Grandma and Me** one of its *Living Books*, a name it uses to describe its series of interactive electronic stories. The moniker is certainly appropriate.

This 12-page on-screen book either reads the animated story to you, or lets you play and read within the pages of a tale of talking characters. Representing a new realm of interactive play, Just Grandma and Me is not only a lot of fun, it's also very educational.

Based on a Mercer Mayer children's book by the same name, Just Grandma and Me leaves nothing out, and adds much in the way of interactivity. A beautifully illustrated story in its own right, the CD offers a great jazzy bongo and piano soundtrack, special sound effects, and animated talking characters with lovable personalities. As a bonus, you can play in English, Japanese, or Spanish.

The reading technique — phrases are highlighted one at a time — guides a young reader through the sentences on each page. If you want to reread a page, a simple click does the trick. You also can select individual words for pronunciation, or start a dialogue with any of dozens of characters on a page.

In short, Grandma, Little Critter, and you leave the house, catch a bus, and land on the beach to experience a menagerie of nature. Experiences range from flying a kite and watching mice water ski to swimming in the ocean and snorkeling with underwater life. After a full day of excitement, you hop on the bus and head for home.

This is no quiet paper book, but a story that comes alive at nearly every turn. Click on a clam shell, a stepping stone, a fence picket, a flower — practically every object on each page — and it comes to life with a musical chorus, a humorous quip, or a jig of a dance. Every movement produces a unique sound effect. Every nook and cranny has someone or something to explore.

Grandma and Me is one of the best titles available in any format, on any platform, for introducing your kids to both the computer and to reading. Its single fault is that it's too short. Twelve pages of material cover the story very nicely, but you'll want more. It's fortunate for us, though, that Broderbund is working on new stories, such as *Arthur's Teacher Trouble*, *New Kid on the Block*, and Aesop's classic fable *The Tortoise and the Hare*. More magic's coming up.

MYSTERY THEATER COMES HOME

The Case of the Cautious Condor is an interactive drama of intrigue and mystery. You join Ned Peters, private detective, and a cast of illustrious characters on the maiden flight of the *Condor*, as you try to determine a murderer's means, motive, and opportunity and, ultimately, answer that perennial question, "Who done it?"

Like other CD multimedia titles, one of Condor's outstanding qualities is its audio. Integrating hundreds of comic-book-style pictures (containing

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In the Case of the Cautious Condor you hop aboard the Condor and into an interactive drama of intrigue and mystery.

more than a dozen characters in dozens of scenes), the audio portion of the game creates the feeling of a 1930s radio mystery program. But rather than simply listen passively to a linear plot, here you interact with characters, plot, clues, and scenes.

The list of characters on this transatlantic flight reads like a high-society invitation list, and includes a munitions dealer, a movie actress, the Crown Prince of Egypt, and many more. Pay attention to the characters, because the plot depends on them.

While the hero, Ned Peters, speaks with a deep, authoritative, intelligent voice, the other characters range from the sultry and snooty to the evasive and arrogant. They're a motherlode of personalities.

Peters, an old war buddy of a man named Bronson, must help his friend with an investigation into the death of a U.S. Customs agent, who turns out to be the illegitimate son of an enigmatic industrialist. While on board Brandon Barnard's *Condor* — a flying boat reminiscent of Howard Hughes' *Spruce Goose* — he suffers a sudden heart attack, forcing Bronson to return to the States, giving Ned and you only 30 minutes to solve the crime.

You must gather the evidence to unmask the murderer. Using a straightforward desktop interface, you click on a photo of each suspect to obtain a brief. Click on each of the airship's 13 rooms to snoop into every corner, look into the suspects' private lives, and peer at the guests' possessions. As Peters uncovers each clue, you'll need to keep checking the details in his notebook. Be discreet but be quick, for the clock's ticking.

You have a suspect? Select the handcuffs from the desktop and click on his or her picture. Confront your suspect with the evidence — perhaps you'll get a confession. Don't be surprised if it takes the whole family several tries to solve this crime.

If you're not a sly sleuth, The Case of the Cautious Condor may remain a mystery forever. Even so, you'll have a great time snooping into the multimedia lives of this creative collection of characters. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

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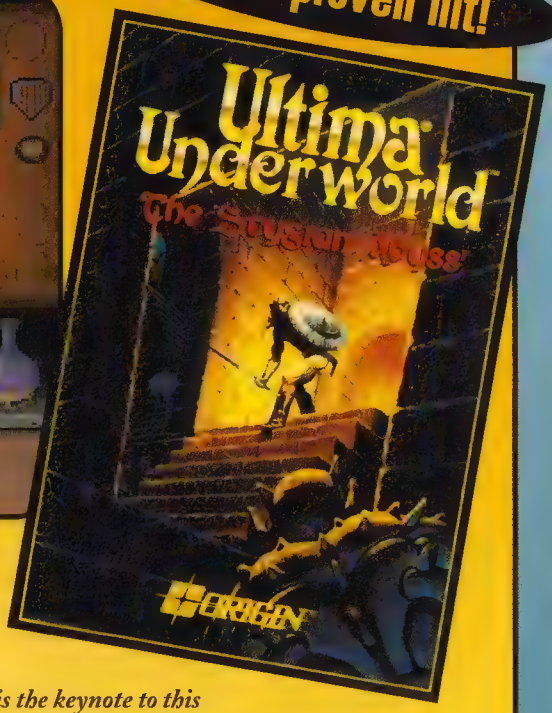

"Ultima Underworld is the premier dungeon game ever made, period. Excellent, without equal."
(Computer Game Review)

"The dirt looks dirty and the marble is cold and hard to the touch. Realism is the keynote to this dungeon. Underworld appeals to gamers who want an extra dose of virtual reality and who relish the exploration of a new, magical universe."
(PCGames)

"Tiptoes right along the edge of virtual reality. Get a taste of what the future has to offer."
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GIFT GUIDE

Whatever your budget, whatever your whim, we've got something for everyone on your holiday gift list.

WE'RE BAAAACK! AS PROMISED LAST YEAR, the *PCGames* guide to holiday gifts really *is* an annual event. Once again we've scoured our shelves, and in some cases, looked a bit into the future, to bring you our end-of-the-year wish list. We've opened enough packages to wear out the box cutter, stuck so many disks in the drive that our wrists ache, and absorbed enough radiation from the monitor to make us glow — all to bring you the ultimate shopper's guide to games.

In a year of family values, during a political campaign that pitted a Vice President against a TV character, we've paid special attention to products perfect for the whole family. But we haven't forgotten the flight-simulator fanatic, the adventure admirer, or the arcade addict. Don't wish for everything — don't be greedy. Just fold back this page, drop the magazine in a strategic spot, and wait to see what comes wrapped in bright paper this December.

Whether you need to keep a tight grip on your money or can spend with the best, there's a holiday gift for your PC on this list. Better yet, we've picked 20 gizmos and games that keep giving all year long, or at least deep into the New Year.

A-Train

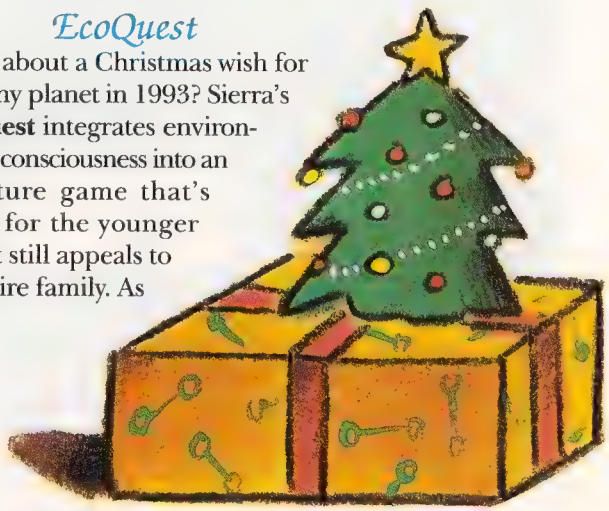
A-Train is methodical and right on track. You build a city from the ground up, with railways as its lifeblood. Start with some bare terrain and lay out your trains track by track and your cities building by building. In no time, you'll be beaming like a proud parent. Also, you can dabble in the stock market and real estate, and check out your business sense. A-Train is involving fun that takes a rewarding investment of time. After all, Rome wasn't built in a day.

CDPC

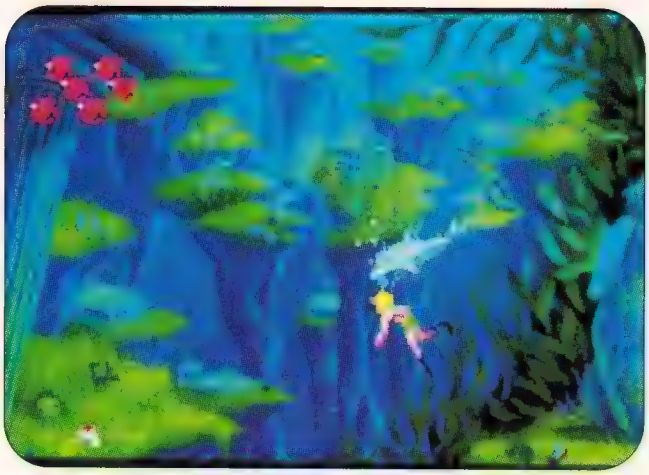
Multimedia games may be a great idea, but unless you've got the right hardware, you can't play. Any of several upgrade kits will boost your PC into the multimedia age, but only **CDPC** crams everything you need into one compact box. Put the CDPC under your monitor, jam the single card in an expansion slot, install the software, and you're ready to rock. CDPC may be pricey, but its components are top-notch, with a fast CD-ROM drive, the equivalent of two audio boards, and enough ports to keep everyone happy. With this peripheral, the whole family can take turns at compact-disc games, educational programs, and reference works.

EcoQuest

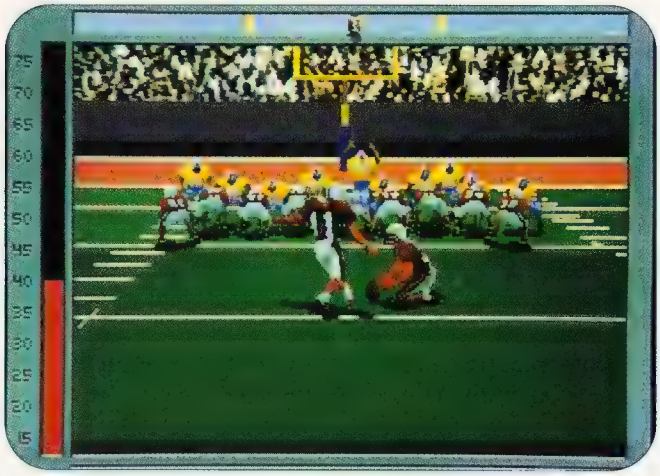
How about a Christmas wish for a healthy planet in 1993? Sierra's **EcoQuest** integrates environmental consciousness into an adventure game that's meant for the younger set, but still appeals to the entire family. As



Compiled by Gregg Keizer
Illustration by Gary Baseman



EcoQuest: environmental consciousness and adventure.



FPS Football boasts top-notch graphics images.

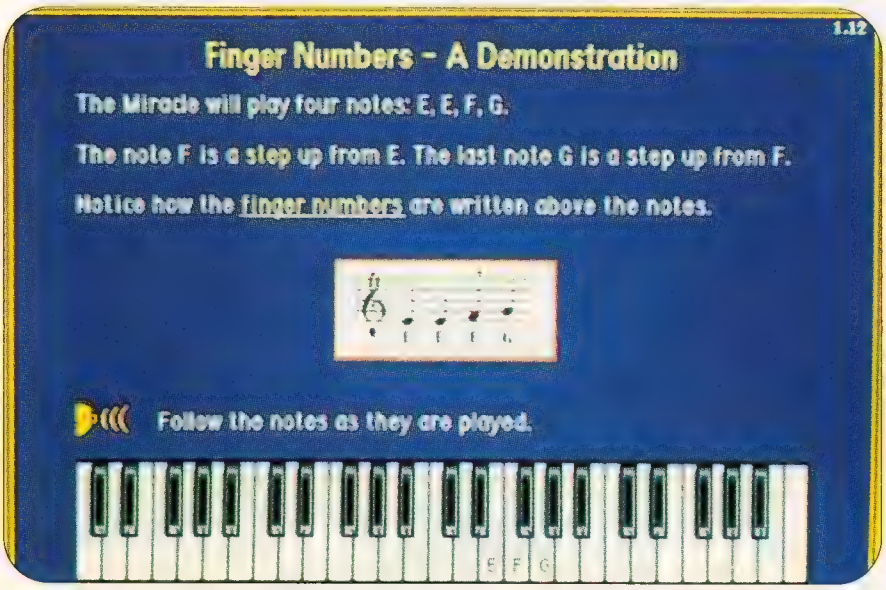
Adam, you and your trusty sidekick Delphineus the dolphin (a Flipper for the '90s) embark on an adventure to save the underwater city of Eluria. You'll explore an ocean kingdom, clean up the world, and subtly learn how we can do our part for Mother Earth. With talking dolphins, fish, and ocean creatures, EcoQuest entertains the whole family with a whale of a good time.

F-15 Strike Eagle III

Flight simulators keep rolling off software publishers' assembly lines, but few sport the heritage of **F-15 Strike Eagle III**. This third-generation flight and aerial-combat simulation sets you in the cockpit of one of America's most-advanced aircraft, and lets you take on all kinds of enemies, real and imagined. State-of-the-art software technology updates the venerable Strike Eagle to take advantage of today's more powerful PCs. You fly a polygon-made jet fighter over terrain that's amazingly detailed, through scenarios that encompass last year's headlines and possibilities of tomorrow's. During the season of peace on earth, goodwill toward all, F-15 Strike Eagle III should be the closest anyone gets to a shooting war.

Front Page Sports: Football

If the name of your game is football, try your coaching hand at Dynamix's **Front Page Sports: Football**. Featuring the best graphics of any football simulation to date, Front Page lets you play multiple roles, from the team owner to the quarterback. Filled with arcade action and pigskin strategy, Front Page also features a comprehensive play editor that's yards ahead of the competition. You can control players before and after the snap, and even assign logic to each player. This in-depth football game is Santa's pick for the PC Super Bowl.


1.12
Finger Numbers - A Demonstration
The Miracle will play four notes: E, E, F, G.
The note F is a step up from E. The last note G is a step up from F.
Notice how the finger numbers are written above the notes.
Follow the notes as they are played.

Sign up for private lessons with The Miracle Piano Teaching System.

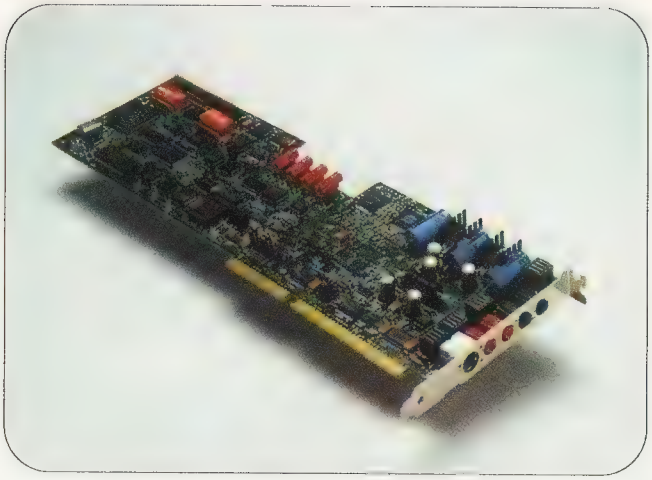
KidWorks

Kids' creativity is easy to tap when you put Davidson's **KidWorks** on the home PC. This combination story writer and picture maker hands children the tools they need to write and illustrate tales, then print them, in color if you have a color-capable printer connected. Not only does the miniature word processor put large-sized letters on screen, but the paint module is easy to use. When kids finish, they can tell KidWorks to read the story aloud — speech is understandable, if robotic — and display pictures at the proper moments. KidWorks is a terrific digital writing tablet and crayon set.

Leisure Suit Larry's Casino

No, *Crazy Nick* isn't the name of a loan shark with a bad attitude, but the moniker that Sierra's put on its budget line of software. These downright cheap games make perfect stocking stuffers for anyone with a game habit. **Leisure Suit Larry's Casino** bundles three Vegas games — blackjack, slots,

KidWorks brings a child's creativity to life on the PC screen.



CDPC boosts your machine into the Age of Multimedia.

and video poker — on one disk. Straightforward and not very flashy, all three send sound effects from the PC speaker and work well with the mouse. You can gamble away the kids' college fund if you want, because all the money is electronic. You even can get a "loan" to keep playing if you can't stop. Christmas in Vegas? No way, not with this budget casino on your PC.

Microsoft Golf

When December weather won't let you put on those tasseled golf shoes, you can stay indoors and enjoy **Microsoft Golf**. This first-rate golf simulation that works under Windows tees off with all the details. You get to play on the Torrey Pines Golf Course (digitized down to the trees and those #^&*! hazards). Everything is here — the fun, the exhilaration, and the frustration — and it's a great game for several people to play at once. The next best thing to actually being there, except there's no celebrated 19th hole. Your only question's gotta be — does Santa do Windows?

The Miracle Piano Teaching System

So, your intonation goes astray when you whistle the second movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 8 in F Major*? That's no problem. If you've always wanted to be a musician, Software Toolworks' **Miracle Piano Teaching System** can be your private piano teacher. With innovative musical arcade games and solid music instruction, Miracle's keyboard and the accompanying PC software are an effective and fun teacher. Miracle even backs you up with a full orchestra at the end of each lesson, for a performance worthy of Carnegie . . . well, the local pool hall, anyway. The Miracle Piano is a great PC gift idea for the family, because it treats everyone — from parents down to that budding Beethoven — as equals.

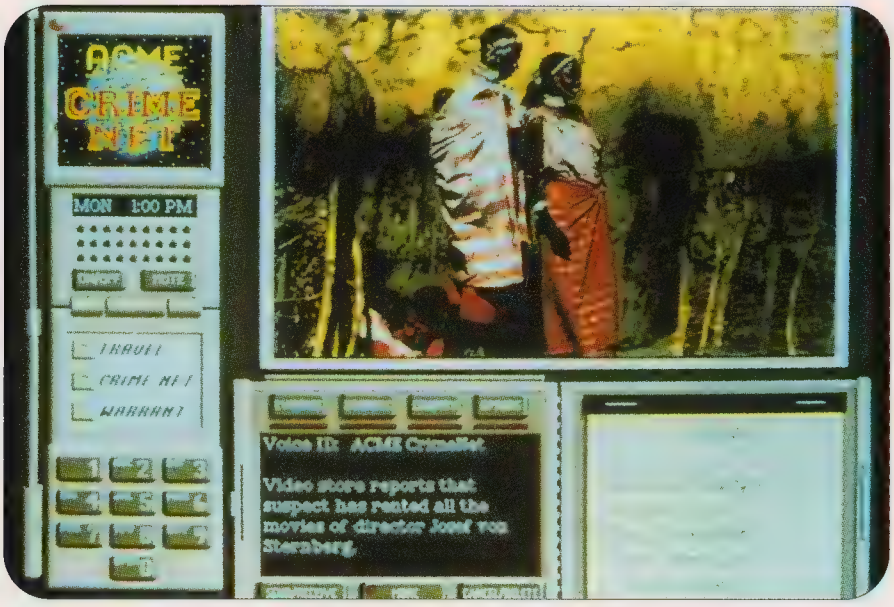
Monopoly Deluxe

Do not pass Go. Instead just fire up **Monopoly Deluxe** from Virgin Games. The all-time classic has come to both DOS and Windows screens in this great re-creation of the favorite Parker Brothers family game. Everything's here, from the famous properties to the jail, from *Chance* to paying taxes. But the board game can't make noise, or make up people with whom to play. This *Monopoly* doppelganger does both. As many as ten real or computerized players can compete for *Board Walk* and *Park Place* in a race around the colorful (and sometimes animated) board. You'll never lose the pieces from this game. Now, if only you could build a hotel on *Madison Avenue*.

PC GamePad

You may have thought you bought your computer so you could catch up on work, but by now, you know better.

Ultima Underworld: the next best thing to virtual reality.



The Carmen Sandiego CD-ROM version offers more talk, music, and graphics.

Computer games are okay. Admit it, you're a serious gamer and the keyboard just doesn't cut it. Gravis' **PC GamePad** is a versatile and innovative joystick/controller. You can use it like a conventional joystick, or as a thumb-style controller, similar to those bundled with the Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo video-game machines. You even can set the pad to accommodate both right- and left-handed players. For all the games you'll play and all the dragons you'll slay, the PC GamePad deserves a spot on your holiday list.

Prodigy Sign-Up Kit

Telecommunications opens doors to the outside world, and turns your home computer into a gateway to information, services, and, most important of all, other people. **Prodigy**, the giant on-line service founded by IBM and Sears, makes a good pick for the family. Bereft of software for downloading, Prodigy makes it up to you with flat-fee pricing, lots of on-line shopping opportunities, easy-to-use electronic mail, and several games that stretch the definition of *groupware*. From The Next President, a multiplayer political simulation of this year's presidential campaign, to Rebel Space, a space opera-like game you've got to pay extra to play, Prodigy's many offerings let you play with *people*, not against a mindless machine.

Stacker

If your hard-disk drive is stuffed like your holiday turkey, **Stacker**, the electronic crowbar, is one way to make more room on your drive's space. Anyone trying to get through gift-giving on a budget will appreciate this solution, which costs less than the cheapest hard-disk drive. You don't even change the way you work with your PC. Stacker compresses and decompresses your files obediently in the background. With newer games taking more and more space, Stacker is a viable alternative to buying and installing a bigger drive. For all of the games you'll play in 1993, Stacker makes the squeeze play on your hard-disk drive.

Super Tetris

Lay's potato chips, Oreo cookies, and Spectrum HoloByte's **Super Tetris** — once you start, you just can't stop. If you couldn't say *nyet* to the original Tetris, but couldn't stand the contrived offshoots (Welltris, Faces, Wordtris), take a gander at Super Tetris. Only this sequel comes close to matching the excitement of the original Tetris, a falling-shape puzzle game. In Super, you clear a set number of rows with limited pieces. The new bombs let you remove rows and erase potentially disastrous mistakes. This is one arcade game that plays to the entire family. It's from Russia, with love.

Stunt Island

Lights, cameras, joystick. If you've played flight simulators until the mere thought of pushing a left-arrow key sends your mind into dizzying barrel rolls, Disney's **Stunt Island** puts a Hollywood twist on the genre. Here, you act as a movie director who sets up aerial stunts, then flies them. You get to place the cameras, select the sets, and roll the film. Satisfying explosions, sound effects, and scads of objects let you customize your movies. Also, you can design and fly obstacle courses, then challenge your friends. An innovative and fun approach, Stunt Island soars.

Time Riders in American History

If you want to really get your kids out of your hair, here's your chance — send them back in time. You can give them a taste of history — and an education at the same time — with The Learning Company's **Time Riders in American History**. You race against the evil Dr. Dread, who's messed with the past, as you try to set headlines straight. Along the way, you meet more than 100 famous characters from American history and work with more than 2000 clues. Join your kids if you want. History's fun for everyone when you put this "edutainment" title on your holiday list.

Trackman Stationary Mouse

When it comes to the PC, *Of Mice and Men* isn't just a good book, it's a way of life. Almost every game uses a mouse, and many more-or-less demand one. But the traditional PC mouse makes you keep space clear on the desktop, and can all too easily get tangled in its cord as you move the unit around. Logitech's **Trackman Stationary Mouse** is a welcome alternative. This strange-looking gizmo stays in place, for you move a tiny

The fate of the free planets hangs in the balance...

LASER SQUAD

LASER SQUAD is a futuristic, tactical wargame that captures life-like characters of a commando unit. Every move must be carefully calculated to account for the morale, energy, and strengths of each soldier.

In each scenario you are allocated a number of "credits" to spend on armor, weapons, and ammunition. The best choice of equipment depends very much on the nature of the mission you are undertaking.

- Dozens of weapons and ammo including assault rifles, rocket launchers, grenades and laser weapons
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trackball with your thumb. Three buttons fit comfortably under your fingers. It takes time to get used to it, but once you do, you won't give it up — even for a hunk of cheese.

Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss

If you're into role-playing, especially those set in dank, dark dungeons, Origin Systems is sinking to new depths just for you. **Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss** is a dynamic role-playing game featuring a 3-D virtual-reality-like dungeon. The dungeon scrolls in real time as if you were actually there. Walk down the corridors and the bricks go by. Look up, and the entire room rotates. Once again, you're the Avatar who has been framed, and you must redeem yourself. Origin delivers a first-rate game that's a technological breakthrough.

Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe CD-ROM

Just where *is* Carmen? Lately, she's been seen on CD-ROM in Broderbund's **Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe.** This one offers the same deductive game play that made the series famous. But because it comes on a compact disc, the game now features more talking cartoon characters, more music, and more digitized pictures. Yul B. Sorry, Robin Banks, and the rest of Carmen's gang are back. As always, Carmen delivers snooping fun for the family, and subtly teaches geography to the kids. (But that can be our secret.)

Windows 3.1

You can't take advantage of the growing number of Windows games without this graphical environment. Even if you're stuck in the DOS world for work, don't pass up Windows for play. You need a PC with at least a 25-megahertz 386SX processor, VGA graphics, 2 megabytes of RAM, and an 80-megabyte hard drive — a description that fits every computer currently for sale. With Windows installed on your hard-disk drive, you can play tons of shareware Windows games, as well as commercial titles. Windows makes your PC easier to use, and gets it ready for 1993's crop of graphics games. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

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Orinda, CA 94563-3346
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CDPC
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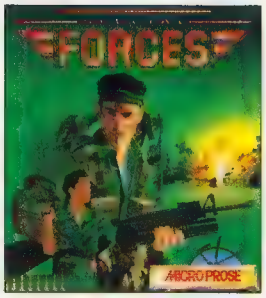

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Circle 11 on Reader Service Card.

Games do Windows, too — and, love it or hate it, PC entertainment will never be the same.

PICTURE WINDOW

By Wayne Kawamoto Illustration by David Groff

What's all this noise about windows? Aren't they just holes in the wall? Aren't they the glass-covered things that let in light and make you daydream about getting out of the house? Talk to almost any PC owner these days and you'll hear all you want about doing Windows. And they don't mean working with a squeegee and bucket, either. They're talking about the PC's most popular graphical user interface (GUI), the operating environment that camouflages DOS with a mouse-driven, icon-busy desktop that depends on point-and-click, not bizarre command-string Babel to make the computer do what you want.

Windows hasn't just grabbed the attention of spreadsheet jockeys and word crafters. It's managed to slip into games, too. In fact, Windows gaming is one of the trends to track during 1991. Over half of *PCGames'* readers use Windows already. More are likely to try it out during the next year, as Windows-specific and Windows-launchable games hit the shelves.

AND LET THERE BE MICE

In the beginning there was DOS. It was cold and unfriendly. Microsoft said it was good, but users demanded something better — look at the Macintosh, the critics said. Microsoft responded with an imperial Let there be Windows.

It took time, but Microsoft finally got its graphical user interface right when version 3.0 hit the streets a year and a half ago. Now, with some 10 million copies sold (though it's less clear how many are actually used), Windows has hulled its way to the front of the DOS-alternative line.

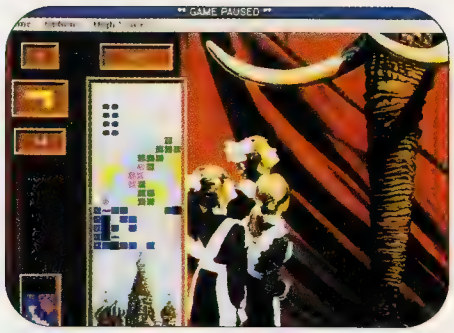
Although major application software publishers scrambled to quickly port their existing programs over to Windows, most game publishers sat back and played wait-and-see. Some are probably still kicking themselves. Not only did Windows' users learn its tricks and techniques, but they

discovered Solitaire, a graphical version of the classic card game that came with the package. They reveled in Windows' take-a-break approach, where they could, with just a couple of clicks of the mouse, walk away from work and start playing. Knowing a good thing when it saw one, Microsoft quickly released its first **Entertainment Pack**, an eclectic game collection created by the company's programmers. Its success spawned three more Packs and managed to extend Microsoft Corporation's power in the computer-game business beyond the venerable Flight Simulator.

One thing common to the first Entertainment Pack games is that they're intuitive, easy to learn, and relatively quick to play. In fact, the Packs don't even include manuals.

Other publishers watched the success of Windows and Microsoft's Entertainment Packs, and probably went green with envy. Some now offer their own games that run under Windows. So far, many of these programs are in the same vein as the Microsoft Entertainment Packs — simple, easy to learn, quick to play.

The Moscow Circus provides a colorful background for Super Tetris.



Lush graphics and addicting arcade action combine in Super Tetris.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

But what does Windows offer the PC game player? For starters, Windows acts as a layer, or buffer, between the program and the operating system (DOS); defines the graphics, manages memory, and handles printers; and provides a consistent interface.

That means that you launch programs by double-clicking on an icon with the mouse. You can also count on some common commands within every program — for example, *Save* is always under the *File* menu, regardless of what Windows application you're running.

In Windows you can arrange several applications simultaneously on screen, each in its own discrete space (window), then switch among them by merely clicking. If you're using a word processor, for instance, you can jump into your favorite game by just clicking on its window.

Windows also manages memory — both conventional and the great beyond. If you've ever had a game that requires 590K of free RAM and had to remove your memory-resident programs and reconfigure your system to load it, you'll appreciate Windows' memory-management skills. And because Windows can multitask, or run more than one program at a time, you can play a game (or work) while you wait for a database to sort, spreadsheet to recalculate, or telecommunications program to finish grabbing your electronic mail.

But not every aspect of Windows is stellar. To run this graphical interface, you'll need some serious hardware. For practical purposes, you'll need at least a 386SX — in fact, most would say at least a 386DX — with a minimum of 4 megabytes of RAM, preferably 8 megabytes. Anything less, and computing slows to a crawl. And make room on your hard drive. Windows takes up some 6 megabytes of space all by itself, plus another 5 megabytes for temporary files.

Early versions of Windows were known for having more crashes than a James Bond movie. The ubiquitous *unrecoverable application error* (UAE) was the interface's famous last words (usually followed by colorful commentary from the user). Fortunately, version 3.1 is much better behaved.

So what does it all mean for game players? Technically, there are few overriding reasons to play a game under Windows instead of DOS. Game play is virtually the same under both interfaces, especially with programs that use a mouse. In fact, most existing Windows games are either versions of established DOS games, or new titles co-released with a DOS version. Many game publishers are opening Windows, but keeping the DOS door ajar, as well.

Then why are publishers climbing through Windows? Much of it is the result of widespread acceptance of the interface. According to Sally Vandershaf, public-relations coordinator at Maxis Software, some 50 percent of the company's customers already use Windows on a regular basis. It just makes sense to write games for them.

One advantage is strictly psychological: Windows makes games and programs more accessible. To start a game, you double-click on an icon with your mouse. Once inside some games (most notably simulations that depend on menus and user-selected commands), you can count on familiar and consistent commands. Some users just prefer the crisp, clean look of Windows and like the way games run under the interface.

But Windows also makes games more tempting. As you work, game icons beckon like cookie jars. And all it takes to stop play is a click on another window — the perfect "boss" key.

BREAK TIME!

Since Microsoft touts Windows as a boost to computer productivity, it's no surprise that the earliest games for the interface were designed to break the monotony of work, maybe even serve as a kind of stress reliever. **Solitaire** is a perfect example.

Windows Solitaire, the popular Klondike version of the card game,

lines up seven stacks and has you reveal the cards in descending order, alternating between red and black. It's a great Windows game, for several reasons: Almost everyone knows how to play the game, so long rules aren't required, and the click-and-drag card interface is about as intuitive as it gets.

You can wrap up a game of Solitaire in just a few minutes, a boon to game play, but maybe a bust to your work productivity. In fact, this easy-in-easy-out aspect makes it difficult to go back to real cards. (It just takes *soooo* much effort to handle the things and deal them.)

Solitaire may come with Windows, but it's not the only Windows card game around. Microsoft's Entertainment Packs, for instance, offer still other versions of solitaire card games, including **Golf**, **Tut's Tomb**, **Cruel**, and **TriPeaks**.

Each Entertainment Pack offers several other games, of course, most notably commercial successes such as **Tetris**, in which you rotate shapes to fit and form lines, and **Pipe Dream**, where you're a hapless plumber frantically fitting pipes together to reroute the flow of green, icky ooze.

One Entertainment Pack game even made the move to Windows itself. **Mine Sweeper**, part of the first Pack, is now included with Windows 3.1. This innocuous game has you deciphering numerical clues in an attempt to uncover mines. The game is quick, addictive, and frustrating, all at the same time.

TaiPai, another popular game in the first Entertainment Pack, is a Windows version of the classic tile-matching game that's seen various commercial and shareware incarnations, such as Shanghai and Mah Jongg. This Windows game, like many others, plays much like its earlier DOS ancestors.

Other publishers have introduced, or are planning to introduce, Windows games in the same style as Microsoft's Entertainment Packs. Spectrum HoloByte's **Super Tetris** comes in versions for both Windows and DOS. Spawned from Tetris, the game that's gone through as many sequels as Rocky Balboa, Super Tetris is actually an improvement on the original, not a contrived and silly game such as Faces and Wordtris.

This game deserves its superlative title, because it takes the original concept to another level. In Super, you have to clear a certain number of rows at each level with a limited number of pieces. Each piece counts. When you clear a line, a bomb drops; you can use it to clear other areas, and thus clean up your mistakes. And the game includes numerous mystery pieces that make rows disappear or award bonus points, for example.

Dynamix, a company best known for flight simulators such as Red Baron and Aces of the Pacific, is also getting into the Windows fray. **Take-A-Break! Crosswords** and **Take-A-Break! Pinball** are the company's first entries. Both games feature flashy graphics images and some limited animation.

Pinball offers six different games, with backgrounds based on Sierra and Dynamix titles such as Willy Beamish, Leisure Suit Larry, and King's Quest. Crosswords hands you more than 100 puzzles, licensed from Dell Publishing (famous for its crossword books). You can work them at different levels, and even ask the computer to help you play. When you click on puzzle spaces, for example, Crosswords highlights the associated clue. When you type your answers, the program tells you whether they are correct.

Quick-play Windows games continue to hit the shelves. Masque Publishing has ported MicroAce Blackjack over to Windows as **Masque BlackJack**. As in the past, Masque takes the concept of computer blackjack a step further by helping you

WINDOWS FOR NEXT TO NOTHING

Go on line or look through any number of shareware disk catalogues and you'll see a big list under the Games for Windows banner. In fact, these games — predominantly mazes, slot-machine simulators, arcade games, card games, and puzzles — dominate by sheer number the shareware entertainment titles available.

Shareware is a method of software distribution that encourages you to copy and pass along a program. If you like a piece of shareware, you're asked to register the package (almost always for a fee) with its author. In effect, you get to try out a game before you pay for it.

Windows shareware games generally feature higher-quality graphics than their non-Windows competitors. (Exceptions include DOS-based games from Apogee.) DOS shareware games too often offer crude or unattractive graphics and are frequently marred by clumsy interfaces. Not so with Windows.

WINPOKER is a good example. This digital version of a Las Vegas video poker machine may not be as complete as something like Masque's Video Poker, but it sports good graphics and game play. And at $15, it's a steal.

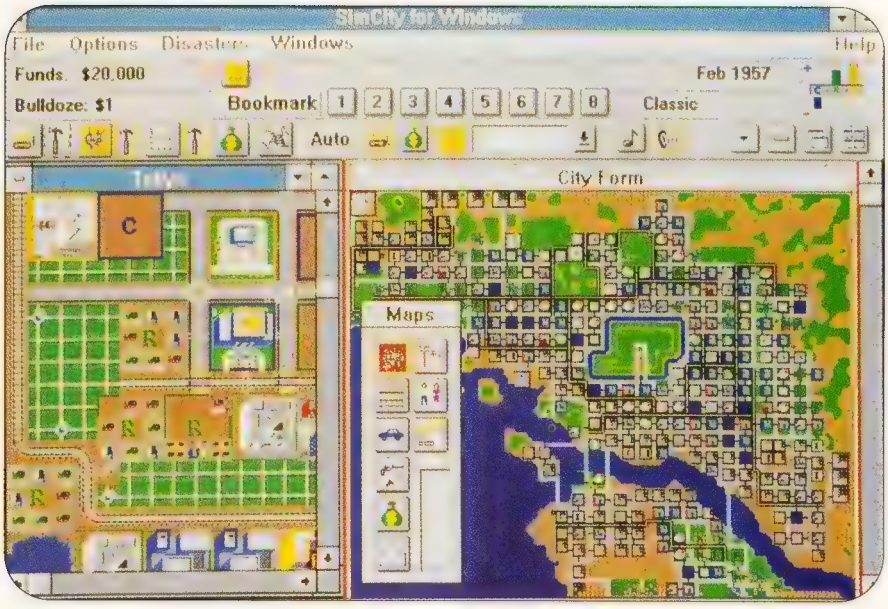
In KYE, the object is to collect diamonds in a maze without getting stuck or eaten. Scattered throughout the maze are objects with different properties. By trial and error, you figure out what each object does, and find a way around it to get to the next diamond. Not a bad game, and the registration is a reasonable $15.

CIPHER FOR WINDOWS comes from Nels Anderson, a programmer known for shareware's Mah Jongg and Shooting Gallery. As its name implies, you decode messages, with game play similar to the code-cracking segments in MicroProse's Covert Action.

Card games are everywhere in Windows. Nelson Ford's CARDSHARK: HEARTS offers three opponents and is reminiscent of Sierra's first Hoyle's Book of Games. Crossword puzzles are almost as popular. Although it lacks the flash of Dynamix's Crosswords, the shareware XWORD, for example, can both create and play puzzles on the PC.

You can find shareware Windows games on any of the on-line services — CompuServe, GEnie, America Online — on many electronic bulletin boards, and in the listings of any of the large shareware and public-domain software disk providers. Good Windows hunting!

— W.K.



Creating a metropolis with Windows makes SimCity that much better.

develop winning strategies for the game and teaching you how to count cards. You can also program the software with different strategies and have it play through 1000 or so hands to see how well each strategy works.

Video Poker is another Masque game come to Windows. Besides offering some first-rate Las Vegas-style action, Video Poker provides expert advice on how to play the hands, and can even evaluate your performance. Like Windows Reversi, Video Poker's window can be adjusted to any size. As much tutorial as entertainment, Masque's BlackJack and Video Poker are good for either a quick game or an in-depth lesson.

SERIOUS STUFF

Not every Windows game works on the short-and-sweet level. Several offer more-serious fun, and much longer game play.

Microsoft broke ground in its third Entertainment Pack with **Fuji Golf**, a game that takes more than an hour to play. Although it pales against simulations such as Links and PGA Pro Tour, it manages to provide semirealistic golf action for Windows fans, especially those who'd rather be playing the fairway than sitting in an office.

Electronic Arts has introduced a Windows version of **PGA Tour Golf**. It's a direct port over from DOS; it simply runs in a window, with essentially identical game play.

And Microsoft is taking golf even more seriously. Working with Access Software, creators of Links and Links 386 Pro, Microsoft has introduced **Microsoft Golf**. Featuring game play and graphics similar to Links', this simulation uses the Windows interface to display items such as the scorecard, an overhead view, a golfer's view, and some information in individual windows you can resize and move at will.

Maxis has moved two of its in-depth DOS hits — **SimCity** and **SimEarth** — to Windows, and bypassed DOS entirely with its newer **RoboSport**. All three simulations work well in Windows (no big surprise), because they débuted on the Macintosh.

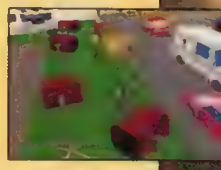
SimCity makes you a combination mayor, city commissioner, and urban planner for a make-believe metropolis. You lay out the city; build industrial, commercial, and residential districts; develop mass-transit and recreational facilities; and generally try to keep your citizens happy and your city growing. SimEarth takes a more macro approach, because you control not just one measly city, but the entire planet. Based on the Gaia hypothesis (which treats the earth as a single organism), SimEarth lets you play with the environment and mess around with evolution.

RoboSport, the thinking person's shoot-'em-up, works as well under Windows as it does on the Macintosh, its original platform. You visually program teams of robots who battle it out in bouts of capture-the-flag, survival, and treasure hunt; they obey your every subroutine and come with heavy-duty weaponry. RoboSport is one of the few games that comes in

RoboSport: the thinking person's shoot-'em-up.

You Call The Shots.

Dive down an island canyon as blasts buffet your biplane and you head toward your landing strip —a speeding train! Trade your stunt pilot's stick for a megaphone and direct the action from the ground, a moving vehicle, even the air. Edit the explosive footage you've filmed with the thunder of sound effects, music and voice-over* in the post-production studio.



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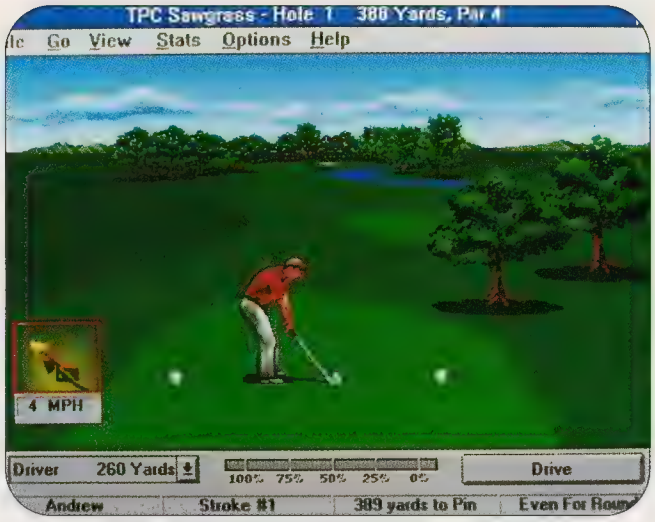
Windows flavor only — there's no DOS equivalent.

Capitalists will certainly want to play Virgin Games' **Monopoly Deluxe** for Windows. A re-creation of that classic Parker Brothers game and accommodating up to ten people (real or digitized), this version gives you the things no board game can — sound effects and animation.

Several chess games now work in Windows, too, including Masque's **Chessnet** and Software Toolworks' **Chessmaster 3000**. What sets Chessnet apart from other chess programs is its ability to let you play across networks and via modem. While playing, you can even chat with the other player. Masque's **Chessnet Club Edition** takes the idea even further — entire teams of players (up to eight) can play simultaneously with just one computer, modem, and phone line at each end.

Larry Laffer has been a traditional office productivity killer, with players spending countless lunch hours following his hijinks. Keying on Larry's popularity, Sierra has moved its **Laffer Utilities** — a collection of 500 jokes, a lunchtime restaurant database, betting pools, humorous fax covers, and numerous sound effects — to Windows.


TPC Sawgrass - Hole 1 388 Yards, Par 4
Go View Stats Options Help
4 MPH
Driver 260 Yards
100% 75% 50% 25% 0%
Drive
Andrew Stroke #1 389 yards to Pin Even For Round

PGA Tour Golf: now ported over from DOS to Windows.

In the end, Windows is just really another platform that can run games. From a pure gaming standpoint, Windows doesn't add to the game play and action already available when you launch a program from the C:> prompt. But Windows does offer some ease of use, a consistent interface and look, and multitasking.

In time, you'll be able to play most anything in Windows. Just take a look at the Mac, the definitive graphical user interface, and its entertainment offerings. Only now are DOS users discovering the benefits of a GUI. It's just a matter of time before Windows games become more sophisticated and more numerous.

Will you be happy in Windows? It's really a personal preference that depends on how you interact with your PC. If you like Windows, you'll appreciate well-behaved games that play in the environment. If you hate Windows, you won't find any game to entice you to move off the command line and into an icon-filled universe — yet. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

All Windows games require an IBM PC or compatible, 2MB RAM, Windows 3.0 or later, mouse, and hard-disk drive.

BlackJack for Windows
Video Poker for Windows
Masque Publishing
P.O. Box 5223
Englewood, CO 80155
(303) 290-9853
$49.95 each

The Chessmaster 3000
The Software Tookworks
60 Leveroni Court
Novato, CA 94949
(415) 883-3000
$99.95

ChessNet for Windows
Masque Publishing
P.O. Box 5223
Englewood, CO 80155
(303) 290-9853
$49.95
requires Hayes-compatible modem
network play requires NetBIOS-compatible network

Laffer Utilities for Windows
Sierra On-Line
P.O. Box 485
Coarsegold, CA 93614
(800) 326-6654
$34.95

Microsoft Entertainment Packs 1, 2, 3, 4
Microsoft Corp.
1 Microsoft Way
Redmond, WA 98052-6399
(206) 882-8080
$39.95 each

Microsoft Golf
Microsoft Corp.
1 Microsoft Way
Redmond, WA 98052-6399
(206) 882-8080
$64.95
sound board recommended

PGA Tour Golf for Windows
Electronic Arts
1450 Fashion Island Blvd.
San Mateo, CA 94404
(415) 571-7171
$59.95

RoboSport for Windows
Maxis Software
2 Theatre Square
Suite 230
Orinda, CA 94563-3041
(415) 254-9700
$59.95

SimCity for Windows
SimEarth for Windows
Maxis Software
2 Theatre Square
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Orinda, CA 94563-3041
(415) 254-9700
$69.95 each
$19.95 upgrade from DOS

Take-A-Break!
Crosswords for Windows
Take-A-Break!
Pinball for Windows
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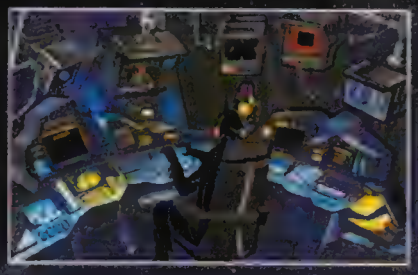
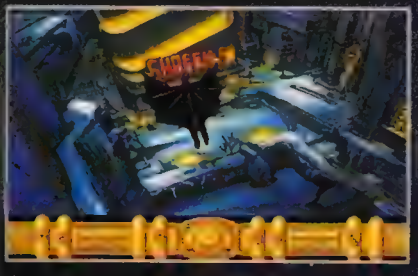
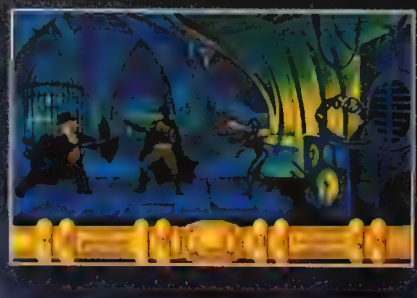




Frigid winter winds swept over an already chilled **Gotham City**. Random street crimes were running at an all-time high, despite the holidays. Down below, in the city's frozen sewers, **Oswald Cobblepot**, known as **The Penguin**, planned more mayhem and schemed the takeover of the frightened metropolis. **Gotham City** *is* in trouble. A desperate call to **Batman** goes up.

Partner with **Batman** to salvage **Gotham City** from **The Penguin's** cold-hearted plot. Guide him in swift, life-like moves from dark alleys to rooftops in vivid scenes straight from the hit movie, "**Batman Returns**." Control his combat style and help conduct relentless interrogations of **The Penguin's** gang. Use the **Batcave** computer to input clues, analyze evidence, and review enemy files. You're in charge of weapons and utilities, too. Save **Gotham City**... and put **The Penguin** on ice.



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SNEAK PEEKS

CAR & DRIVER

By Wayne Kawamoto

You are what you drive, the car makers like to say. That's scary. It means most of us are stodgy, slow, gutless, and waiting to fall apart in a cloud of rust. But if you are what you *play*, you can do better. You can be a Ferrari or a Corvette, a Lotus or a Lamborghini.

Electronic Arts' Car & Driver simulation features excellent action and superb graphics. It makes good use of its namesake, *Car & Driver* magazine, as it combines the publication's favorite high-performance vehicles with EA's simulator technology to create a top-notch driving game.

Car & Driver: high-performance vehicles in a top-notch driving simulation.

HOW MUCH IS THAT COBRA IN THE WINDOW?

Car & Driver features ten cars and as many real and fantasy roads, tracks, and stretches of asphalt on which to put them. This variety of surfaces lets you choose your type of driving. Go for the speed on the oval tracks, or joyride to your heart's content on the roads. Of course, the real reason you'll want to play Car & Driver is to experience the driving machines that are out of reach for most of us. Car & Driver offers a mixture of present-day stock rockets and old-time classics that sport realistic handling characteristics.

The *Car & Driver* magazine connection obviously inspired this game's well-done interface, because each menu looks like a page. The main menu, for instance, is akin to an issue's table of contents. As a bonus, you can read more about each car by flipping to the on-screen reviews, ripped right out of the pages of *Car & Driver*.

Graphics images are well done and on a par with the best on the market. The scenery and cars are worked in filled polygons, but still convey a surprising amount of detail. Polygon-fill graphics usually have an angular look that typically has a tough time mimicking the subtle curves of cars and airplanes. But Car & Driver's machines look more rounded and smoother than those in earlier games.

You get sound and fury along with glorious graphics, thanks to engine noises and other effects. (You must have an audio board.) You even can pick a radio station, then drive to the music.

Choose a vehicle and a track, and you'll soon find yourself careening around the curves and screaming through the straights. Feeling like the next step from Accolade's Test Drive III, Car & Driver features more cars and tracks, but the non-circuitous routes are short.

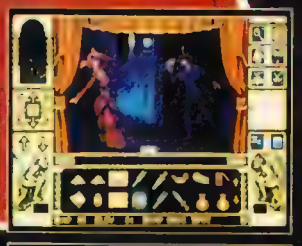
You can select any of several perspectives from which to watch the action, from the default driver's seat to the view from a chase car. The driver's viewpoint offers a heads-up display map of the route, an invaluable aid, because it's sometimes hard to distinguish the road in these games, particularly when you get off the beaten track. Car & Driver shows you how many Gs you're pulling as you turn those really tight corners.

Car & Driver's controls are straightforward and easy to use. As with most racing simulations, the controls get touchy at high speeds. But you can also make the car indestructible or race against an opponent on another computer via modem or serial cable.

Of course, pushing a joystick doesn't much feel like yanking a steering wheel. Until steering-wheel and shifting hardware make it to the desktop, we'll have to live with somewhat unrealistic controls. But all in all, Car & Driver is a dream come true. ❑

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible; 20MHz or faster, 640K RAM (extended memory recommended); VGA; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster; requires hard drive; joystick recommended; $59.95

Jack wasn't nimble.
Jack wasn't quick.
So Jack became a candlestick.



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DARKLANDS

By Peter Olafson

Darklands, MicroProse's first venture into role play, succeeds splendidly.

Realism and role play — they're antonyms, opposites, poles apart. Role-playing games may like to think they're pushing realism, but on the PC, few follow through with the goods. Women still lounge around in medieval bikinis. Magic exists only to justify the impossible. Combat is life's eternal truth, a dungeon looms upon every rock, and experience points are a path to godhood. You have freedom of action only as long as you stick to the story.

Darklands, MicroProse's first venture into role play, aims to provide that neglected realism. For the most part, it succeeds splendidly.

HISTORY CAN BE A DANGEROUS PLACE

Darklands is set in a real place in a real time — the greater Germany of the 15th century — and while some liberties have been taken in the name of playability (myth buries fact in places), the designers struck delightfully close to their goal. No other game is so fully researched and still so unburdened by its sense of history. Ties to the past give Darklands a quiet, authoritative edge. This is a world we already know.

How so? For starters, there are no dungeons per se, although your party of four will set foot in some nasty town and country spots. You won't find the traditionally oblique job descriptions — such as fighter, rogue, mage, and priest — here, either. Spells are verboten, too, for their functions have been replaced by alchemy and religion.

Finally, though there's many a quest to complete, Darklands doesn't depend on a defining plot device. No omnipotent demon, dark wizard, or evil king to put in his place, although there are lots of all-too-human, bad-tempered villains abroad in the dark streets and thick forests. Hence, there's no real end to Darklands, save death or retirement. Your goal is to survive and enhance your status. How's that for realism?

Darklands is the first truly non-directed role-playing game since Datasoft's Alternate Reality: The City and Mindscape's Scavengers in the Mutant World. The result is a kind of free-form play that lets you live a little, to go where you will and try what you want. And if you think this is a mere shell of a game without enough background presence to stick, well, that's where the world comes in. The setting holds it all together. It's a lot like life.

Prepare to read a lot. This is a literate game, which is unusual these days. (Be gentle with the mouse, or you'll fly past key passages.) The many cities consist of interlocking text menus laid over pleasant time- and place-sensitive backdrops. By contrast, the outdoors will remind you of nothing so much as A-Train's landscape-à-la-bank-camera. And during the real-time, animated combat, the meat of the game and a great deal of fun, Darklands goes in for a closeup from the same angle.

Details make or break more than their share of games. Darklands' details — from the lovely variety of encounters that pop out of the woodwork to the unobtrusive music to the authentic money system — help to crank up the realism. Darklands emphasizes skills over attributes and puts more stock in endurance than hit points; it even manages to include reputations, so that as you play, people approach you with missions. It's flattering to have someone tell you he's heard of you, even if he's only a computer-game character.

My favorite is the ability to assign party members different tasks when everyone's at the inn: take a job to earn

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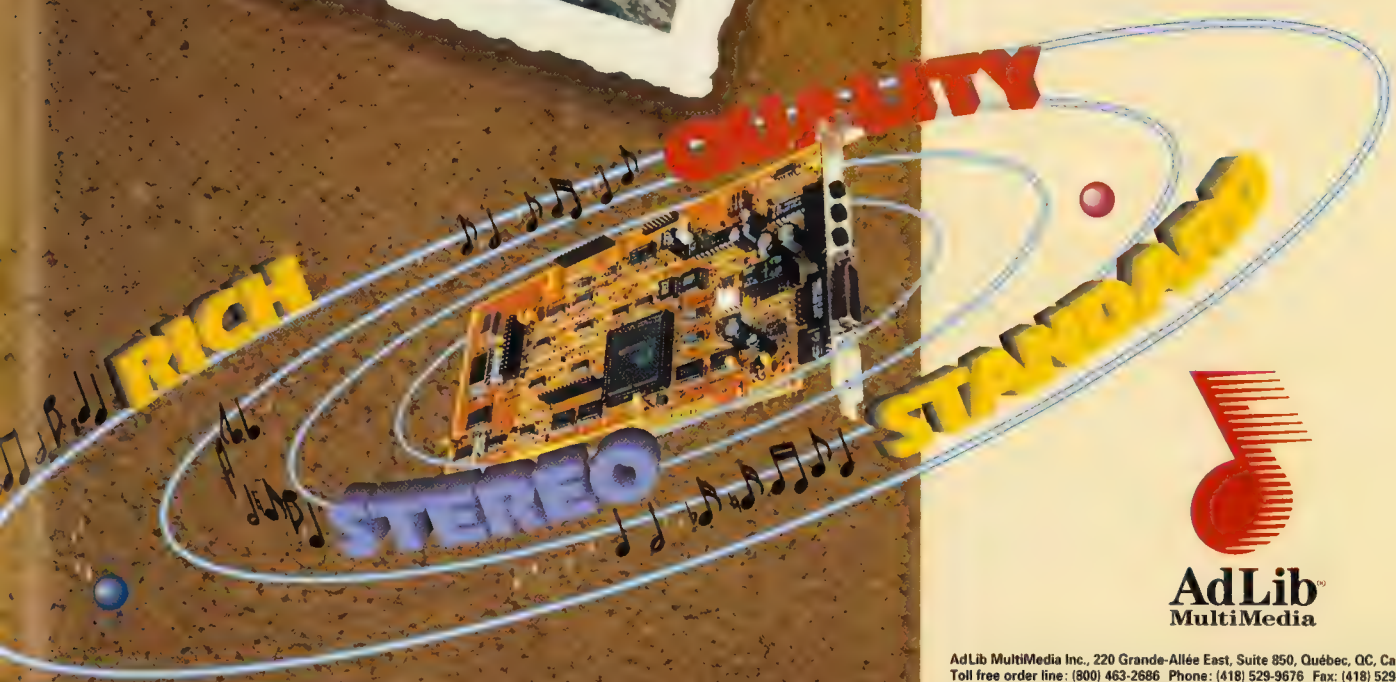

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a bit of money, work on alchemical formulae, recover lost strength, or just sleep. Typically, role-playing parties do things en masse, so that if one character needs to rest, everyone rests. Talk about being joined at the hip.

I'm uncomfortable with a few oddities, though. For instance, selecting a male character doesn't necessarily mean you'll be Y-chromosome in combat. And I couldn't for the life of me find a way to load a saved game from within Darklands, and wound up quitting in order to restore.

After spending time with the directed kill-the-demon games that plague the shelves, you may find it tough to adjust to Darklands' open-endedness. Blame those cities-by-text, which can, with time, feel empty and standardized. Moving from menu to menu just doesn't match the sensation of moving in a real world. It's more like moving through your computer. Perhaps a supplementary 3-D mode would have spread Darklands' sense of place throughout the entire experience. And yet, it would have made the game just like everything else. And Darklands, I'm delighted to report, is like absolutely nothing else.

MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (410) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible, 2MB RAM, DOS 5.0; VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster, ProAudio Spectrum; requires mouse; $69.95

MICROLEAGUE BASEBALL IV

By Jim Bail

Baseball may look like a slow-moving sport, but, like an iceberg, what you see on the field is only a fraction of what makes the game. What may look lackadaisical is actually thoughtful defensive placement of each player. What appears to be indecision on the part of the pitcher is really just part of the mental cat-and-mouse game he plays with each batter.

All this subterranean strategy doesn't make it easy for people who are unfamiliar with the game to follow the action. But one way you can learn, or relearn, its intricacies — is to plug into MicroLeague Baseball IV.

The newest in MicroLeague's line of baseball simulations takes the strategic approach to America's game, and gives you even better control over teams. More player ratings and coaching options make the game more realistic, while a tight and intuitive interface makes navigating its options anything but a hassle. The result is one that lets you concentrate on managing players on the field.

MicroLeague Baseball IV includes streak ratings for both hitters and pitchers, just one of its nice touches. Before baseball junkies had computer games like this, they rolled dice on the kitchen table and played Strato-Matic wherever they could find the

Creating the perfect society is difficult...
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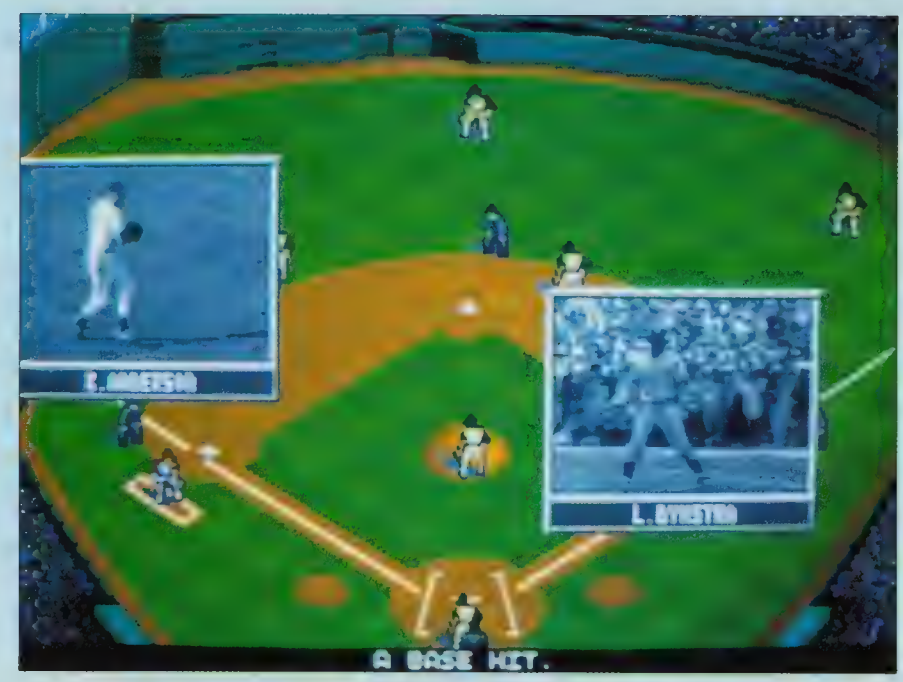
Meet your Cabinet. Six alien Advisors consult on Weapons, Engineering, Research, Psychiatry, Military Issues and Colony Administration.

flat space. So much was left to the imagination, and many of the game's basics simply couldn't be taken into account. In particular, player hot streaks were simply a matter of luck with the dice. Nowadays, any self-respecting computer simulation should incorporate this facet of baseball.

Baseball is full of streaks, and a good manager rides them until they're exhausted. MicroLeague Baseball IV takes advantage of streaks, and though the clutch rating isn't prominently displayed on a player's statistics screen, each one has a rating that affects the outcome of each time at bat.

Other interesting statistics note whether a batter is a junkball or fastball hitter, his abilities versus left- or right-handed pitchers, his skill in pulling or hitting to the opposite field, and how well he can sacrifice. Of course, pitchers are rated, too.



MicroLeague Baseball IV: Pop-up video brings the game closer.

On the field, you decide how deep the outfield plays, whether they play it safe or play aggressively, and whether the batter should pull or hit to the opposite field. Your pitcher takes your cue to pitch around the batter, pitch normally, or go right at him; infielders align in anticipation of the bunt, guard the lines late in the game, or play behind the runner at first.

MicroLeague Baseball IV is full of ratings, and includes defensive evalu-

...defending it is brutal.

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ations of players' fielding percentages, ranges, and even arm strengths. All these stats come together on screen.

Just as in the real game, much of your team's success depends on the work you do before you hit the field. MicroLeague Baseball IV's playbook editor lets you draw up a virtually endless list of offensive and defensive plays. And as in the real game, you must have those plays down pat long before your players leave the dugout. You can, for example, set the infield shallow and poised for the batter to pull, while the first baseman holds the runner on and the pitcher pitches around the batter. It's easy to create, label, and save this complicated play in MicroLeague Baseball IV. Of course, not all your plays need to be so complex.

THE HOUR-LONG SEASON

In MicroLeague Baseball IV, you can set up and maintain a schedule of any length you want. With a few strokes on the keyboard, the computer will play a complete 162 game season automatically in less than an hour. If you have the time and the patience to take your favorite team through a season, you can play your team's games manually while the computer takes care of the rest of the day's matchups. This multiplay feature works especially well when you play down the home stretch of a tight pennant race. Tell the computer to play the season up to the last week, then adopt a team to take to the pennant.

What's baseball without statistics? MicroLeague Baseball IV is nothing short of excellent in its statistical capabilities. You can, for instance, print historical stats or compiled statistics from your season. For an illuminating side trip, print the hitting and pitching leaders at the All-Star break, then again at the conclusion of the regular season to see which players sustained the pace. It's almost as interesting as seeing who wins the pennant.

You even can update these statistics during a real season by connecting to *USA Today* Statistics, assuming you have a modem. (You'll pay $5 per download.) This ability alone makes MicroLeague Baseball IV a stand-out simulation, because you can play along with an end-of-year pennant race, or run through an electronic playoff or Series with stats that reflect what the players are doing now, not last year.

Video-in-a-window, a popular add-in for many games, makes its baseball debut in MicroLeague Baseball IV. As you play, small windows appear to show you video footage of action that mimics what's happening in the game. It's impressive.

Other parts are less impressive. Many of the stadiums (four come with the game, and you can buy additional stadium disks) turn players' skin tones a strange shade of purple. Disconcerting, to the say the least, and something that forced me to play games far from either team's home.

Even with its video problems, MicroLeague Baseball IV is a must for any PC-owning baseball fan. Not only does it deliver on its promise as a strategic master, but unlike other stat-based sims, it's anything but boring — just like real baseball.

MicroLeague Sports, 2201 Drummond Plaza, Newark, DE 19711, (302) 368-9990; IBM PC or compatible, 286 or faster, 640K RAM; VGA; supports AdLib, Big Mouth, DigiSpeech, Echo II, Media Master, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, Sound Blaster, Sound Source, SpeechMaster, Tandy sound; requires hard-disk drive, 3MB free space; $49.95

AN AMERICAN TAIL

By Cynthia E. Field

Only a cruel cat can resist the innocent charm of Fievel Mousekewitz, the furry little star of Stephen Spielberg's animated films *An American Tail* and *An American Tail: Fievel Goes West*. These contemporary children's movies recount the story of Fievel and his rodent family as they flee Russia and menacing cat-Cossacks and head straight for the land of the Statue of Liberty, the place where the streets are paved with cheese. Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled mice yearning to be free.

MOUSECAPADES

Whether or not you and your kids enjoyed these movies, children aged 7 and up can jump right into the Mousekewitz saga with An American Tail, a new computer game published under the Capstone label by IntraCorp.

As in the movies, this colorful adventure revolves around Fievel's separation from his family as they journey from the old country to New York City, and again when the Mousekewitzes seek a new life in the American West. During each game children encounter enemies such as Warren T. Rat, and friends such as Tony the street-wise mouse, Tiger the broccoli-loving cat, and Wylie Burp, a canine with a big nose for trouble. (Unfortunately, the Wylie in this game doesn't have Jimmy Stewart's voice — or any audible voice, for that matter.)

Fievel and other characters are brightly colored, even cartoon-like, and stand out against the mostly muted background scenes, which, according to IntraCorp, were digitized from the Spielberg films. But while the game's graphics really do resemble scenes from the movies, An American Tail lacks the films' wonderful soundtrack. A cute and catchy, if somewhat monotonous, tune plays throughout the game, but you'll be disappointed if you expect to hear such memorable songs as *Somewhere Out There* coming from the computer.

A self-running disk introduction describes Fievel's experience in Russia and the family's arduous trip across the Atlantic. Each game actually begins at *Immigration* (presumably Ellis Island). From there, use the keyboard, mouse, or joystick to help Fievel proceed from one scene to the next.

I found it clever that the cursor looks like a wedge of cheese. Exit signs appear as you move the cursor near appropriate hot spots on screen, and when you bump the cursor into a character who has something to say, it

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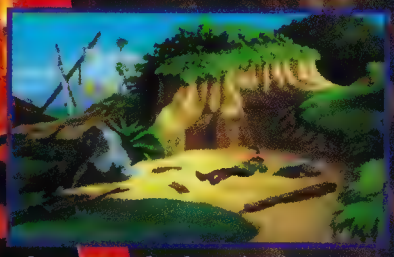

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Fievel's silver-screen escapades come to the PC in An American Tail.

changes to a white speech balloon. The tails on speech balloons point to the right, sometimes away from the character, which can be confusing. Move the cursor to Fievel, and you can click to see the things you've gathered or won along the way.

You can save up to six adventures by clicking on icons. You return to the DOS prompt by clicking on the stop sign. This game's point-and-click interface couldn't be easier.

CAT-ASTROPHES

Whether exploring the mean streets of turn-of-the-century New York, wandering in the desert, or discovering Green River's insidious secret, Fievel has a penchant for running into trouble. But with your help, he can outsmart his captors by solving the puzzles they present. Among these cat-and-mouse challenges are a *Concentration* game, a shell game, a dots game, and a *Simon Says* game in which you mimic the sequence of flags that pop out from holes in a chunk of cheese.

Other playful activities include the arcade-like shoot-out and a jigsaw puzzle depicting the Mouse of Minsk — mousedom's "seqwet veapon" against the Mott Street Maulers. When Fievel loses a game or is stung by a huge desert scorpion, he merely trudges across the computer screen, head held in shame. There's no grisly violence. Because reuniting Fievel with his family and defeating the cats can take hours, it's a good idea to save your game early and often.

But despite its many attractive features, An American Tail doesn't always measure up to its animated ancestors. You risk sanity trying to play the game from floppy disks, and playing from a hard drive is little better. The hard-disk installation utility provides two options, *S* and *F*, which are still torturously taxing.

On a 16-megahertz 386SX PC, the *S* option occupied 4 megabytes of space, and took 15 minutes to install, but played excruciatingly slowly. Long, black pauses during screen transitions make you swear the monitor died. Or just make you swear. What should be a simple procedure — saving a game — took 15 seconds. Selecting the *F* hard-disk installation option made the game play faster, but the files occupied 5 megabytes and took nearly a half hour to install. Maybe this one needs to be on compact disc.

Installation quirks aside, you should be even less tolerant of the program's capitalization and apostrophe errors, misspelled words, and run-together sentences. While few programs are perfect, the frequency of grammatical errors in An American Tail is jarring.

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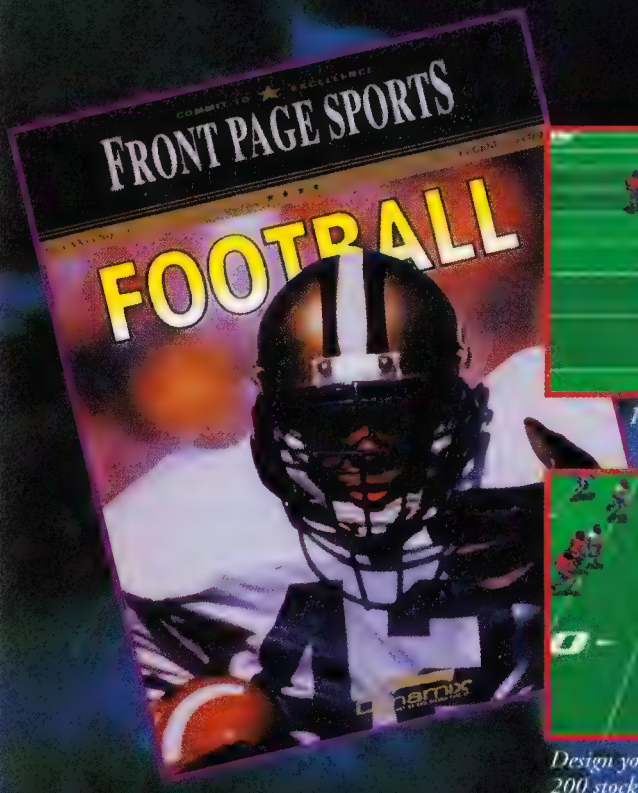

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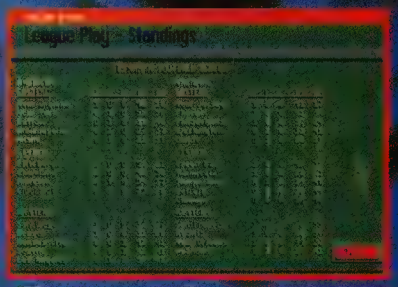

The action varies from city to city, just like in real life.

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Ironically, while the game's scene changes can be painfully slow, some text frames disappear so quickly that even adults will have trouble absorbing everything. Any program — and especially one designed for youngsters — should let players take their time and click the mouse only when they're ready to move on.

Parents need to be aware that some of the vocabulary in An American Tail is way too advanced for 7-year-olds to recognize in print. Passages such as "the shrewd businessman in me prefers not to be inundated by suspicious mice that could jeopardize our plan" can be daunting. To its credit, the program's text passages and dialogue are mostly easy to read, and the manual includes a vocabulary section with simplified definitions of selected words such as *inundated* and *jeopardize*.

An American Tail, the game, should win big with kids, thanks to the popularity and appeal of the movies from which it takes its name. But while the computer version's story line parallels Fievel's silver-screen escapades, the program is a disk hog; hard-drive installation is a chore; and the abundance of grammatical errors is unforgivable.

Capstone, 14540 SW 136th Street, Suite 204, Miami, FL 33186, (800) 468-7226, (305) 252-9040; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM, MS-DOS 2.1 or later; EGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Roland LAPC-1, Sound Blaster, Sound Master, Tandy sound; mouse or joystick recommended; $44.95

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND CD

By Tom Carlton

Seeking fame and fortune, easy money, and a freewheeling, glamorous way of life? Want adventure, where your wit must be twice as sharp as your sword? Then join Guybrush Treepwood on Melee to search for The Secret of Monkey Island.

Pirates and hidden treasure live on in this CD-ROM version of LucasArts' game, offering excellent graphics, music, and sound effects, and a selection of five languages with which to hurl inflammatory insults. The compact-disc format features a splendid stereo soundtrack of calypso and reggae music, along with striking sound effects, though voices are unfortunately absent. Add an enhanced icon-based inventory, a simplified interface, and stunning 256-color images of scrolling scenery, and you get a CD that's clearly better than its floppy ancestor.

Monkey Island's plot is straightforward. You must master three things: the sword, the art of thievery, and the search for treasure. Then pilot a ship to the forbidden Monkey Island and rescue the love of your life from the necrotic hands of LeChuck. The characters are insolent, yet hilarious. The puzzles challenge your imagination and the story keeps you chuckling.

The clean, simple interface makes navigating a snap. A touch of mouse, keyboard, or joystick takes you from scene to scene. The top two-thirds of the screen displays the animation window, where action scrolls by in a cinematic panorama. The bottom section offers a vocabulary of nouns collected in your icon-based inventory and an ample supply of verbs, such as *give*, *use*, *look at*, *open*, *push*, and *pick up*.

You move through scenes and construct sophisticated interactive sentences via a point-and-click system. A new auto-highlight feature spotlights an appropriate verb when the cursor touches an object on screen. When you walk to a door, for instance, the *open* is highlighted and ready for a click of the mouse. It's very smooth.

The same feature works with the dialogue choices, resulting in a logical progression. You'll want to explore beyond this directed narrative, however. All dialogue is displayed in the animation window. If you're running Monkey Island on a fast machine — say a 486 — reading everything can be

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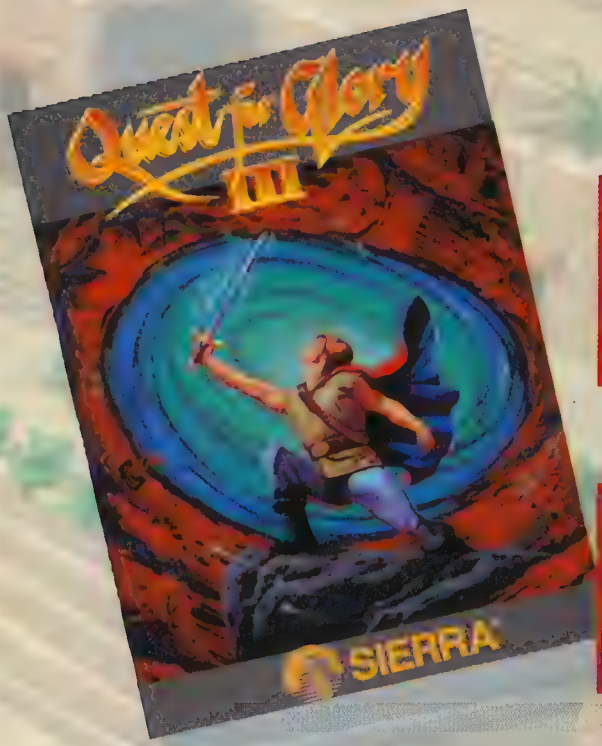
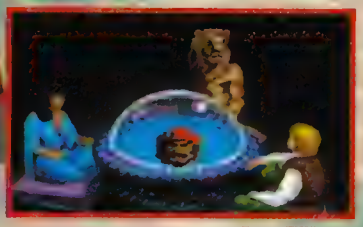


Choose your character and modify his skills and attributes.

Puzzles have multiple solutions depending on your character type.



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If your character survives, he may discover an unspeakable evil that lives at the very heart of fear and violence. To succeed, he must cut to the core of the mystery with his mind, not sort through a series of stats or slash through a thousand computer-generated monsters.

This is the newest chapter in the series *Compute* magazine called "a breakthrough in adventure game design." Play as different character types, approaching problems with different skills and solutions. Every decision you make builds your Hero... and shapes his destiny.

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Monkey Island on CD features a simplified interface and dynamite music.

difficult. It's fortunate that the game lets you speed up or slow down the message line by pressing the plus (+) or minus (–) keys. All games should offer this feature.

Unlike many other CDs, Monkey Island doesn't give voice to its characters. You're stuck with reading, not listening. The calypso and reggae music, though, is just unbelievable. Just as good are the game's dazzling sound effects. Listen to the ocean lapping under the wharf, sea gulls squawking, and ships' bells clanging. It makes your sound board worth every penny you paid.

While all this is impressive, Monkey Island could stand a better sync between these great sounds and its animation. What's the use of wave sounds when there are no waves? While not detracting from the game, it points up another missed opportunity.

SHARP INSULTS AND RAPIER WIT

This adventure's plot, sense of humor, and interesting characters are commendable. Developing your skills as a master of the sword requires a lot of dueling practice, or rather insult practice. You'll find plenty on the paths leading from town to various points of interest. If threatened with insult from a scar-faced, saber-wielding pirate who claims that "People fall at my feet when they see me coming," your comeback might be "Even *before* they smell your breath?" You must develop this wit before you confront the sharpest of tongues, the Sword Master.

After reaching Monkey Island, you must still rescue the beautiful woman from the ghostly grip of LeChuck. Here's where Guybrush kicks butt, though not before you're confronted with the jungles of Monkey Island, the vile castaway Herman Toothrot, and natives preparing to make Guybrush soufflé. You'll need primal instincts and primate friends before you acquire the means of LeChuck's end.

The Secret of Monkey Island offers hours of humorous adventure for the entire family. If you've ever wanted to be a grog-swilling, swashbuckling pirate, this is your CD. I heartily recommend it to anyone who'd love to blow insulting winds in the rigging.

LucasArts/Software Toolworks, 60 Leveroni Court, Novato, CA 94949, (415) 883-3000; IBM PC or compatible, 286 or faster, 640K RAM, DOS 3.1 or later; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, compatibles; requires CD-ROM drive, Microsoft CD Extensions 2.1 or later; $79.95

LORD OF THE RINGS VOLUME 2: THE TWO TOWERS

By Bernie Yee

Read the novel, then watch the movie, and you may wonder whether you fingered the same pages as the film maker. Too often, Hollywood takes more than creative liberties with a writer's vision when it's transferred from paper to the silver screen.

So it goes for game makers moving popular plots and characters from prose to the PC. All too frequently, they make a mess of the original, and manage to twist it into something its author would rather reject than recognize.

It's fortunate, though, that some games buck that trend, as Interplay's Lord of the Rings Volume 2: The Two Towers proves. Interplay has studied the original artist's work and captured its spirit in an interactive gaming experience. Fans of J.R.R. Tolkien's seminal fantasy trilogy, *Lord of the Rings*, will appreciate the care.

FATHER OF FANTASY

Lord of the Rings has spawned, or at least played a role in spawning, fantasy role-playing as we know it. Several computer and video games have paid homage to Tolkien and tried to stick his trilogy inside a computer. They haven't always been successful.

Of course, any attempt to make Lord of the Rings into a game is bound to irk the purists. Still, Interplay's first installment, The Fellowship of the Ring, did capture the elegant simplicity and mysticism of Middle Earth, a world where magic is mysterious and can't be measured in hit or spell points. The Two Towers follows in its sibling's footprints.

Tolkien's novels features Sauron, the Dark Lord, a mystical dark angel who came to power after his master Morgoth (a Lucifer-like being) fell. By tricking the elven smiths, Sauron created the One Ring, an evil artifact

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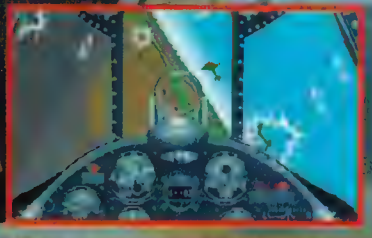
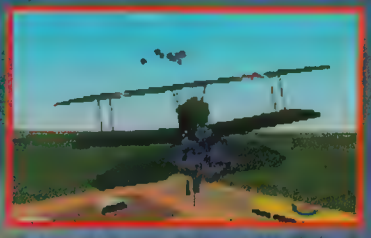
Blast your way through [illegible] low-level attacks. (RBM II)

Sink enemy ships with torpedoes and dive bombs – if you can. (Aces of the Pacific)



Hang on as enemy fire rips through your cockpit. (RBM II, 1916)



Take on the great Axis and Allied aces in [illegible]. (Red Baron)

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of surpassing power. In a great battle, men and elves overthrew Sauron, but failed to destroy the Ring.

The lost Ring traveled from owner to owner until it ended up in the small hands of Frodo Baggins, a hobbit. Gandalf, a wise wizard, recognized the Ring and organized a quest to Mount Doom, the volcano forge where the ring was created, and the only place where it could be destroyed.

Through the first volume of the trilogy (and Interplay's first game), the Fellowship of travelers made a harrowing journey towards Mordor, Sauron's domain. And as in the book it emulates, the PC version of Lord of the Rings Volume 1 ends with betrayal and death.

Don't feel left out if you didn't read the trilogy (although it should be considered required reading for all fantasy role-playing gamers). Two Towers, the game, is fairly self-explanatory, and you can certainly play if you haven't had the chance to get through the book.

Lord of the Rings Volume 2 features a top-down view and detailed graphics.

Two Towers begins as Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas set off in search of Merry and Pippin. They encounter Eomer, and Gandalf reborn as the White Wizard. From there the action switches to Frodo and loyal Sam, his faithful sidekick. Interplay switches viewpoints when each segment of

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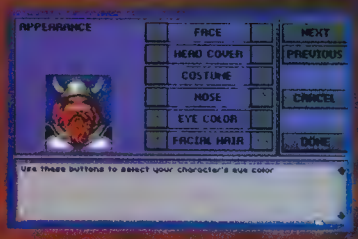
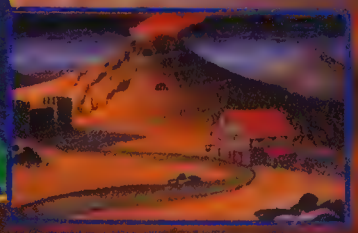


Create your own face and personality, modifying your skills, attributes, and character class.



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the Fellowship reaches a predetermined point. This cliff-hanger-style approach works well, and keeps you locked into the disparate travels of the sundered Fellowship.

This sequel looks identical to the first installment, with a similar icon-driven interface, although graphics are somewhat refined. The view is strictly top-down, with Middle Earth spread out in excellent detail. An automap feature has been added, a welcome addition to your characters' extensive travels. Except for some peripheral quests and a few characters not in Tolkien's work, this game is true to the spirit of Middle Earth. That's at least partially because of the book included — which uses much of Tolkien's own prose.

Unlike a novel, a game can let you control characters' destinies. So it is with Two Towers — to an extent. For though I managed to keep Glorfindel and destroy the Balrog without killing Gandalf in the first installment, in Two Towers Glorfindel's gone and Gandalf is thought dead. That's as it should be.

Veteran fantasy role-players may find Tolkien magic weak — in the books, Gandalf never did more than cast spells to ignite a tree, open a door, and crack a bridge, not very impressive for the second-most-powerful being in Middle Earth. In Tolkien's world, magic is subtle and works quietly. Forget about casting lightning bolts.

The highest compliment a reviewer can pay Two Towers is to say that it's all the things a good computer role-playing game should be: detailed, fun, easy to play, and faithful to the original creator's universe.

If you liked Lord of the Rings Volume 1 or loved the novel trilogy, play Two Towers. It'll be like coming home again.

Interplay Productions, 3710 South Susan, Suite 100, Santa Ana, CA 92704, (714) 549-2411; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, Sound Blaster; mouse recommended; $59.95

CARRIER STRIKE

By Ed Ferrell

Hundred-thousand-horsepower engines turn the screws that push your flattop through the waters of the South Pacific. Nearly 100 warplanes, over three dozen 40mm guns, and thousands of men make your command the most destructive force on the high ssea. The aircraft carrier was truly *the* ship of the mid-20th century.

SSI's Carrier Strike assigns you the critical role of commanding WWII naval forces in the Pacific campaign. This oceanic front was the only war in which carriers fought other carriers, long before modern missiles put flattops in harm's way and relegated them to the floating-airstrip role they play today.

You can play either side in the war's most famous engagements, from the critical Battle of Midway, to lesser-known scraps such as the Battle of Santa Cruz. Like a real admiral, much of what you're doing is managing resources, although these resources are historically accurate collections of ships, planes, and men. One minute you're ordering Task Force 54 to steam toward a target hundreds of miles away. The next you're rationing the *Yorktown*'s hangar elevator so you can get a squadron of Hellcats in the air.

Before you engage the enemy, though, you have to find him. Each Carrier Strike mission may put your ships in the middle of the action, but that action begins in a nail-biting, hide-and-seek fashion. As each day's dawn breaks you must find the enemy. Carrier Strike turns you into a hunter; locating the enemy (or hiding from him) may be the most critical component of a successful battle. Because some players may be up on their history and know where the Japanese fleet lurked off Midway, Carrier Strike lets you employ a random enemy-placement option. It keeps the thrill of the hunt in the game.

Some scenarios provide thorough search help from land-based air strips, but it's a good idea to launch early-morning search missions from your flattops. Search planes leave the task force and form spokes outward from your ships in the directions you select. While the search is on, you tend to housekeeping matters, such as arming squadrons of fighters and bombers.

LAUNCH ALL AIRCRAFT!

Flight-deck control is the heart of Carrier Strike. From here you move squadrons of planes out of the hangars, fuel and arm the aircraft, and raise them to the deck for launching. Handle all Hellcats at once, or create smaller strike groups, each armed with different ordnance.

Each turn in Carrier Strike represents 20 minutes, so your actions are limited. You can't arm and launch the same planes during the same turn, for instance. Hangar elevator operation is particularly limited, as is fueling. Only careful organization will send a steady flow of fueled and armed planes to your flight deck.

When your search planes get a good look at the enemy task forces (assuming the information is reliable), you'll need to select effective squadron complements for the job. Of course, once you see the enemy, they're likely to fix your position, too. You'll want to put combat air patrols (CAP) above your ships. These fighters protect the carrier task force, and keep enemy bombers off your back. Neglect CAPs, and you may find your task force afire. When the deck's aflame, you can't launch a counterattack. Serious damage may drydock a carrier for up to two months, hampering your ability to complete the campaign.

Weather and cloud cover play an active role in Carrier Strike, too, so you can hide a task force under clouds or in squalls. Other things, such as carriers turning into the wind when launching or retrieving aircraft, are automatic.

Eventually, you'll juggle airborne squadrons on search, CAP, and strike missions. And if that isn't enough to send any air-traffic controller on strike, it gets more complicated at every turn. Keeping track of ships and planes —

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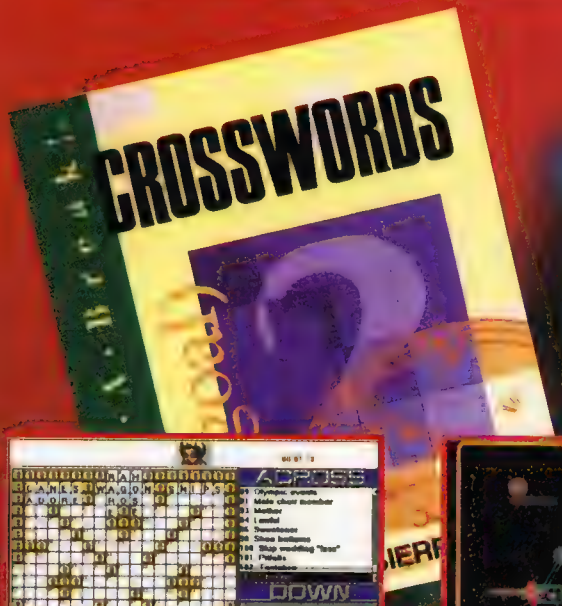

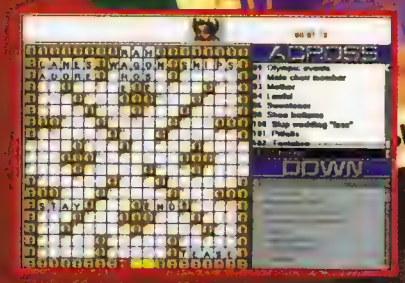

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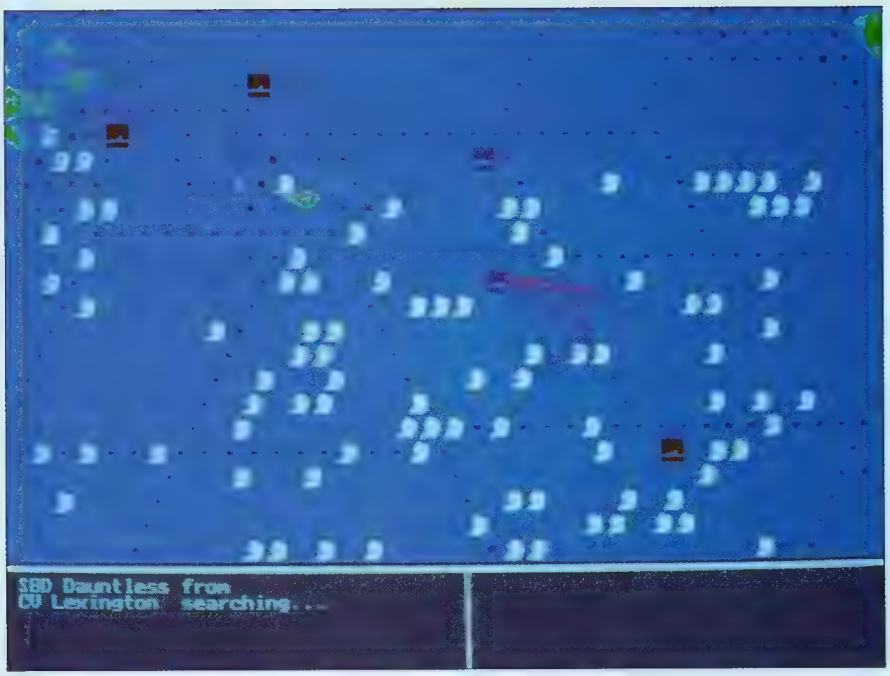

Carrier Strike: Cloud cover restricts your efforts as you search for the enemy.

especially after loaning air squadrons from one task force to another — creates a confusing chain of events.

Time passes in Carrier Strike just as in history, so as the war progresses, the Japanese gradually lose their advantage of better pilots and more-advanced aircraft. Improvements in radar further enhanced the American efforts in the later years of the war — if you survive to that point.

Long on simulation, Carrier Strike is short on graphics, providing only the standard SSI icon pieces. You won't miss much, though, because with so much to do, you don't have time for pretty pictures.

The computer can generate an infinite number of battles and can play either or both sides. Unlimited hypothetical battles further increase the replayability of the game.

Carrier Strike is soaked in historical accuracy. You'll need to maintain high standards of team management, make precise moves, and fly skillfully to operate aircraft safely from shipboard. Simply moving aircraft from hangar to deck is an intricate and dangerous maneuver, and doing it while under attack must become second nature.

Experience the tension of hide-and-seek on the high seas in this fine conflict simulation. Who knows, maybe they'll name a ship after you.

Strategic Simulations, 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, (408) 737-6800; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster; mouse recommended; $69.95

HONG KONG MAJONG PRO

By Brad Dixon

Computer clones of board and card games are nothing new. So you can't say that something like Hong Kong Majong Pro, a mah-jongg tile game come to the hard disk, is breaking any new ground. You *can* say, though, that it's one of the best translations of a classic to the PC.

Hong Kong Majong Pro's VGA graphics images make its tiles, game board, and opponents pop from the screen. Its audio makes play nearly interactive, because the computer players celebrate victories and bemoan their losses. And its play mechanics make it suitable for everyone, from newcomers to old hands at this traditional Chinese game. Hong Kong Majong Pro will give you hours of entertaining solitary play.

The best place to start with Hong Kong Majong Pro is with its tutorial. Both on-screen instructions and manual are excellent — patient and explicit — so that even novices have ample instruction before taking on the game's built-in opponents. Once you've had the computer hold your hand, you can get on with the game by picking your players and picking up tiles.

Electronic Arts took pains to provide an accurate representation of mah-jongg, and models this PC version after the gambling game played today in Hong Kong. Similar in some ways to the more-familiar card game rummy, mah-jongg instead uses "hands" of tiles, which you play in an attempt to accumulate a win before someone else beats you to it.

You can build a winning hand in any of several different ways, but the three most common are the combinations *chow* (a run of three tiles of the same "suit"), *pong* (three tiles of the same character), and *kong* (four tiles of the same character). Majong Pro also offers a number of other winning tile combinations, which take considerable skill or luck to collect. Hands like *Gates of Heaven*, *Seven Pairs*, and *Jade Dragon* are not only much more difficult to collect, but they also earn you valuable bonus points when you win.

You'll be lucky to draw opening hands that lend themselves to the basic combinations, much less the fancy hands. Hong Kong Majong Pro plays tough. You may not have to be a pro to get long evenings of enjoyment out of this game, but if you're not familiar with the intricacies of mah-jongg, it's easy to get frustrated in your efforts to collect even the lowly *chows*, *pongs*, and *kongs*.

It's fortunate, though, that you can pick opponents to suit your skills. Hong Kong Majong Pro includes 12 electronic players, complete with bios that tell you how well they play and whether they play for fun or for profit. The list offers a range of

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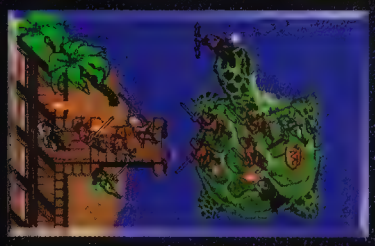
PART TWO



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Hong Kong Majong Pro: one of the best translations of a classic.

opponent abilities, so you can assemble your digital enemies with an eye to your own playing skills. From the raven-haired Wing Yin, who plays for fun (as shown by her digitized delight when she wins) to Wong Ho Ming (a cutthroat who likes to play with discarded tiles placed face down), the faces across the board provide both easy fodder and superb challenge.

The Spirit of Majong (a sparrow) is always ready to offer help when it's your turn. The Spirit gives only elementary assistance, so you can't ignore the manual or the tutorials. Even in games against more experienced players, though, Hong Kong Majong Pro is forgiving. Attempt an incorrect move, and an instructional box tells you of your mistake.

As an exercise for experienced mah-jongg players, Hong Kong Majong Pro provides worthy adversaries and a game that plays exactly as it would with real tiles and dice. Middle-distance players test their skills while they learn from watching other players. Beginners pick up a stimulating alternative to solo card games and in the process learn the rudiments of a centuries-old pastime.

Hong Kong Majong Pro is a game you can grow to love. It's challenging, fun, and a welcome change from endless rounds of solitaire.

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM, DOS 3.0 or later; VGA, SVGA; supports AdLib, Roland, ProAudio Spectrum, Sound Blaster; mouse; requires hard-disk drive; supports expanded memory; $49.95

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LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS 2

By Peter Olafson

Do I know you? A sequel typically has enough in common with its parent that the two wouldn't have to chat about the weather if they met on the street. But Infocom's two Leather Goddesses of Phobos adventures are like distant, distant cousins. The names are the same, and there's something vaguely similar about the sense of humor, but otherwise they're strangers.

The original is a primal tale of lust, weakness, and bad '50s science

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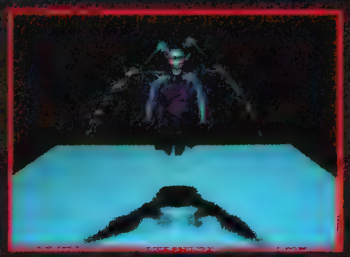

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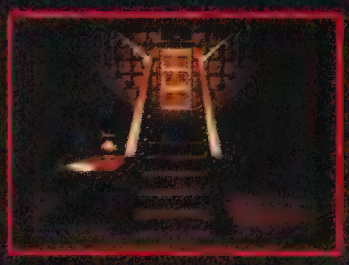

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Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2 is a point-and-click graphics adventure.

fiction, all brought to the screen during a time when graphics were heresy, plain and simple, to hardcore adventurers. This newest version, from a recently revived Infocom, is a point-and-click graphics adventure with a solid hour of speech, music, VGA, and animation. It's a very sporty, snug 1992 package, and exactly the sort of game that would have made a dedicated Infocom fan bristle — with some justification, as it turns out.

BEACH BALLS, BABES, AND BARNEY FIFE

Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2 is set in the rather austere confines of Atom City, Nevada, a no-traffic-light town bounded by the Mesquito Indian reservation, an army base, and . . . well, a rock slide. Ordinarily the rock slide would be a tunnel, but a spacecraft set off the slide when it crash-landed. Its occupant, an alien beachball with eyestalks, roams loose, frightening the bejesus out of everybody. The Goddesses, who turn up a bit later, are essentially leather-undied space Amazons who are making a second attempt to enlist Earth's population as love slaves. Not bad work if you can get it.

The town's easy to find: It's halfway between Parody and Stereotype. The sheriff is a dead ringer for *The Andy Griffith Show*'s panicky Barney Fife. A good chunk of the female community is already doing Leather Goddess-style work in the local brothel. (Remember, this *is* Nevada.) People seem to have gotten their ideas about alien life from the movies: Explicit and oblique references to bad science-fiction pictures, and even to good science-fiction computer games, abound.

In purely aesthetic terms, the game is sweet. Everyone speaks in his or he own distinctive voice, provided your machine has the right audio hardware. If it doesn't, you can use the included gizmo that plugs into your printer port, which helps pipe sound through your stereo. By contrast, the music's only okay — a little too Leisure Suit Larry-ish and affectedly zany for my taste — and I wish they'd shut it down when someone's talking.

The lush full-screen VGA graphics could have come off the cover of some 1950s magazine. They're typically static, but you can often view a given scene from more than one direction, a touch that only adds to the process of discovery. And the you-click-on-it-you-carry-it interface is butter slick: directional arrows for movement, a toolbox for retrieving the odd stuff you'll collect (a staple remover, a rubber hose, an army uniform, iodine), and a little mouth for chatting. That last one brings you in for a closeup encounter and a set of icons: portraits for questions on particular topics, lips for kissing, and occasionally a screw to . . . ah, y'know.

TRIPLE THREAT

One of the nicest things about Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2 is that you can play it from the perspective of any of three different principal characters: garage operator and man's man Zeke Zarmen; his sweetheart Lydia, daughter of the local scientist; or the Alien, whom we'll call Barth for short. That's charming from the story's point of view alone.

Naturally, you can coax the game into a lot of nonessential contorting and babbling under your probing mouse pointer. The brothel is almost incidental to the game, but offers pinup poses of a dozen women. You can pop into the radio station and play the game's incidental music. You'll find a number of items with no obvious use in the solution, but bet there's some fun that lies deeper. (There's even a buried plug for the forthcoming graphics adventure Return to Zork.)

But for all these enjoyable little perks, the game itself is rather small for a 15-megabyte whopper. Like a number of recent, easygoing graphics adventures, this one's little better than an afternoon's entertainment, maybe two and a half afternoons if you play all three parts. (If you've played through with one character, the others become that much easier.)

Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2 seems to have been swallowed up by the amenities, rather than simply abetted by them. The puzzles of old are gone; this game clearly comes from the "find it here, use it there, then haul it around forever" school. Exploring the town and its environs is fun, but your progress is almost automatic once your little party leaves Earth. Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2 is far too easy for any but begin-

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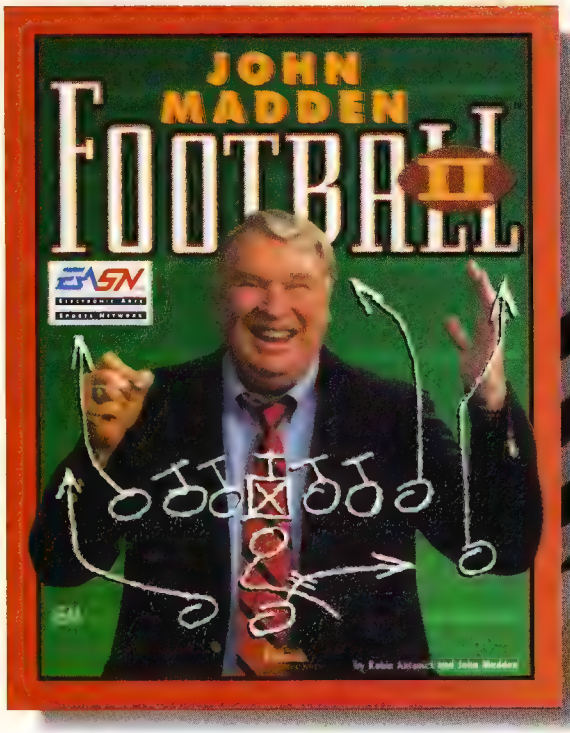

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The basic Boom Box screen puts the tools of a record producer at your fingertips.

ning gamers — who are probably too young to be looking at semi-naughty bits anyhow.

Like many sequels, this one lacks a clear reason for its existence, beyond the popularity of the original. It's as though the shiny new interface itself was justification for its publication. You'll giggle occasionally, but it's more cute than funny, especially compared with the Spellcasting series for Legend. It's not even all that sexy.

To top it off, my copy of LGOP 2 came on *17* (count 'em) 3.5-inch low-density disks. By the time Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2 was installed, I felt as though I were working in some dead-end disk-factory job and needed a coffee break. Bring on the CD-ROM.

Infocom, P.O. Box 67001, Los Angeles, CA 90067, (310) 207-4500; IBM PC or compatible, 10MHz 286 or faster; 640K RAM (560K free/VGA, 590K free/EGA), DOS 3.3 or later (DOS 5.0 recommended); EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, PS-1, Roland MT-32/LAPC1, Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro, Sound Master, Sound Source, Speech Thing, Thunderboard; requires hard-disk drive, 15MB free; mouse recommended; $69.95

BOOM BOX

By Larry Canale

I'm not a musician, but somehow I've just finished creating the music for a three-minute rap song. (The hint of wonder you detect is for all those who believe you have to be a trained musician to make rap music.)

My masterpiece is possibly the worst thing I've ever heard, but it's *mine*. The tools for my sudden burst of musical inspiration? Dr. T's Boom Box, a PC with keyboard and mouse, a midline Samsung color monitor, and a Sound Blaster Pro audio card. I saved my song to a file called BIGHIT, but the fact is, no one will ever hear it — it's that bad. But then, it's mine.

THE VIRTUAL MACHINE

Whether or not you're a musician, you can use Boom Box to compose your own songs. As the documentation boasts, the program lets you "play hundreds of different sounds, add drums, bass, and synth patterns, then record your mix and play it back." Each of the three screens you can access — *Boom Box*, *Remix*, and *Jam* — provides musical patterns that serve as a base.

The patterns become annoying after you've heard them several times, but there are ways you can change things. When you're in *Remix* or *Jam* mode, for instance, you can slow down the tempo to as little as a grindingly slow 39 beats per minute, or speed it up to a chaotic 399 beats per minute. In addition, you can adjust the pitch, create loops and repeats of particular riffs, play around with "solo pads," and add any of the dozens of oddball rap sounds to your songs. Among the samples you can pull up are record scratches, vocal echoes, guitar and keyboard snatches, rat-tat-tats, buzzes and vibrations, sirens, beeps, and snare sounds.

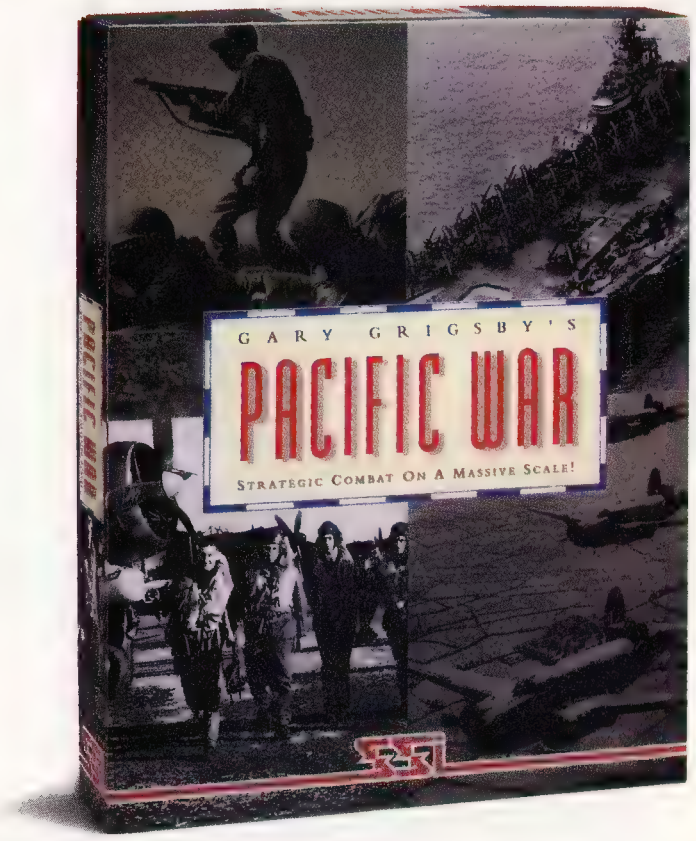
The basic Boom Box screen is designed to look like the real thing, complete with a cassette, two virtual speakers that vibrate (graphically) when the bass starts booming, and volume sliders that let you kick up the sound. *Remix* and *Jam* screens look like crude kiddie sound boards and include drums/bass/synth/solo sliders, solo pads, controls for repeats and loops, and FX buttons that activate sound effects.

All three screens offer those staples of boom-box design: record, play, stop, pause, rewind, and fast forward. In *Jam* and *Remix* modes, those last two options are tediously slow — slower than what you're used to with standard analog cassette tape units (never mind the instant access you may be used to with CDs or digital tape). You can use fast forward in the Boom Box screen to hear your masterpiece at double speed (it does get it over with faster) and rewind to hear how your songs sound backwards. (John Lennon would have loved that option.)

Boom Box's documentation is useful enough, offering helpful *Try It* tips that walk you through the recording, mixing, jamming, sampling, and playback processes. In fact, you may be able to plow through without the instructions, courtesy of trial-and-error and the help screens.

Ultimately, Boom Box is mildly entertaining — but also cheesy. Whatever you come up with sounds like

LAND! AIR! SEA!



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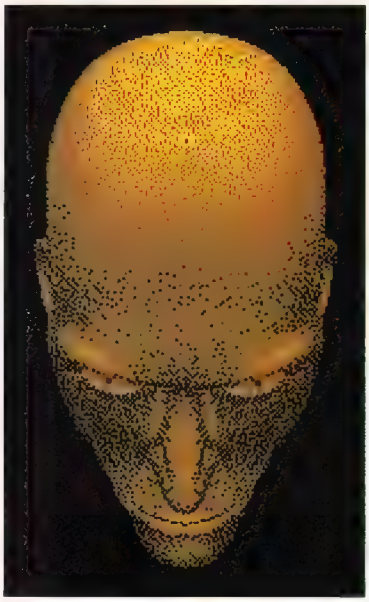

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NEW MATH BLASTER PLUS FOR WINDOWS

By Heidi E. H. Aycock

Most upgrades are better — sometimes even worlds better — than their predecessors. But if the original was flawed, the update can often inherit that flaw.

Davidson's graphics upgrade of Math Blaster Plus is a good example. If you liked earlier incarnations of this drill-and-practice math game, you're going to love New Math Blaster Plus for Windows. But if you weren't wild about Math Blaster when it worked in DOS, this new version's much-improved graphics and sound won't do much to change your mind.

RETREADED NUMBERS

Anyone who liked Math Blaster Plus — and there are a lot of you out there — will find this Windows version a good investment. New Math Blaster Plus for Windows retains the qualities that made its ancestor a bestseller. It comes with a large collection of equations that range from simple arithmetic to difficult division. And you can tailor the program to suit your children's needs with the built-in equation editor, which lets you make math problems.

This updated program also features some redesigned motivational games. The best of the lot is *Number Recycler*, which presents children with a list of equations to correct. The trick is to use only the numbers stored in the recycling bin, without wasting any. *Number Recycler* requires that kids think ahead, consider their resources, judge the consequences of their choices, and learn some math.

Two of the other modules simply ask kids to fill in missing answers to equations. In *Trash Zapper*, children earn ammunition for shooting down space fiends. The amount of ammunition depends on the number of correct answers they give. In *Rocket Launcher*, kids earn parts for their space ships as they fill in the blanks. When the ships are completed, they blast off. In still another module, kids help the little Blasternaut character fly to the space station bearing the correct answer to an equation.

EXTRAS

Besides changes in program design, new technical tricks will impress any Math Blaster fan — and even some cynics. If you have an audio card in your computer, you'll hear New Math Blaster Plus' more-interesting sound repertoire. The beeps and boops of the old DOS version have been upgraded to more-complex musical and mechanical noises, although the improved audio still doesn't measure up to what you commonly hear in a good entertainment package.

Graphics images are also much improved. Sharply drawn, these pictures are quite colorful, though not exceptionally bright. Animation is smooth and, at times, intricate. Compare its graphics with those in other versions of this program, including New Math Blaster Plus for

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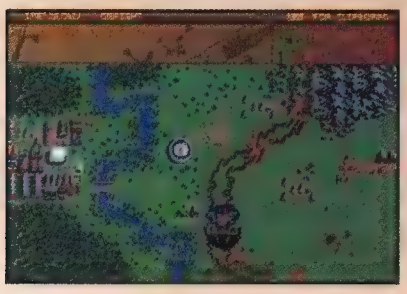

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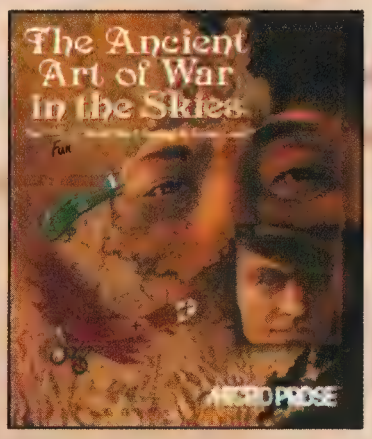

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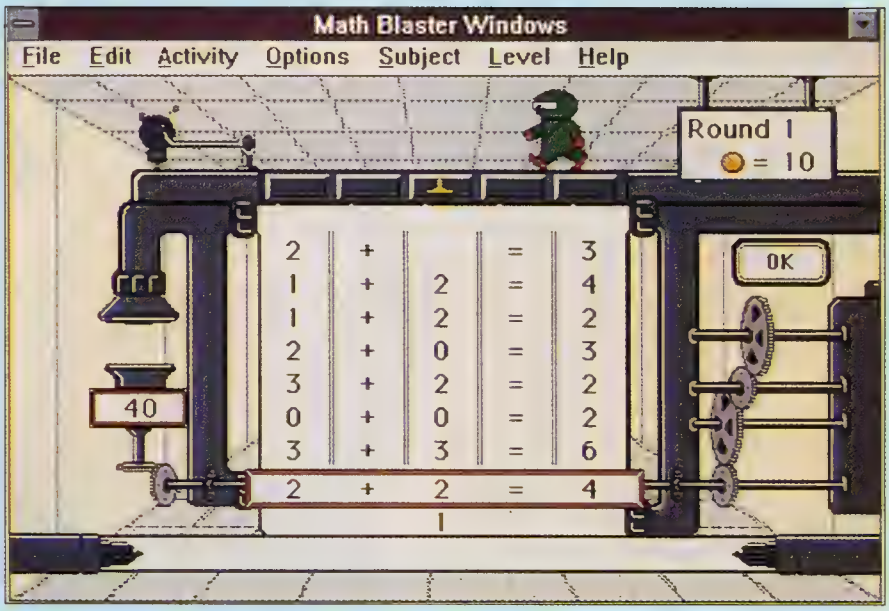

New Math Blaster Plus for Windows sports a new look, but an old vision.

DOS, and you'll be surprised at what the Windows interface offers. Children should find the visual presentation inviting.

LIKE IT THEN, LIKE IT NOW

These enhancements will please anyone who likes the mixture of arcade-style sequences and drill-and-practice exercises. But if you haven't bought into the idea that computerized drill works, this gussied-up version of New Math Blaster Plus probably won't change your mind.

In many cases, the arcade sequences don't work harmoniously with the exercises. Although the game portions of *Rocket Launcher*, *Trash Zapper*, and *Math Blaster* offer motivation and positive reinforcement, the line between work and fun is so obvious that it seems the latter is there only to convince you that learning can be entertaining. The math seems to slow down the game, while the game seems to distract from the math.

More disappointing is the awkward way New Math Blaster Plus utilizes (or underutilizes) the Windows interface. Most obvious is the window-size limitation — you can't maximize the New Math Blaster Plus window to take up the entire screen. Less obvious is the fact that Davidson failed to exploit one of the best aspects of the Windows interface — windows. Even though it's a retread of an existing title, New Math Blaster for Windows should have put the interface's multiple-windows abilities to work improving the educational experience. Exercises could have been annotated with simple, conceptual explanations, for example, or accompanied by graphics representations of missed equations. If a child misses the answer to *3+2*, for instance, a window could appear showing two alien space ships, joined later by three more.

Assuming you want to use drill-and-practice exercises on your computer, New Math Blaster Plus for Windows is a good choice, especially if you're aching to move your kids out of DOS and into Windows. And if you enjoyed the Math Blasters of the past, you'll surely like this updated version.

I just wish Davidson had pushed its vision of Math Blaster as far as it pushed the program's looks.

Davidson & Associates, 19840 Pioneer Ave., Torrance, CA 90503, (800) 545-7677; IBM PC or compatible, 2MB RAM, DOS 3.0 or later, Windows 3.0 or later; VGA; requires hard-disk drive; mouse; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro, ProAudio Spectrum; $59.95

MICROSOFT GOLF

PGA TOUR GOLF FOR WINDOWS

By Wayne Kawamoto

Anyone who dares wear those goofy tasseled shoes will jump at a chance to play a round of golf anytime, anywhere. Maybe that's the secret to digital golf — it feeds on the voracious appetite of fanatical men and women who just can't get enough of that little white ball.

Or maybe it's something different. Maybe PC golf simulations can really capture the essence of the game as they deliver some of the fun, the mental challenge, the on-the-edge-of-the-green excitement, and the frustration. All this, without getting into a golf cart or those funny knickers.

Two new golf simulations — Microsoft Golf and Electronic Arts' PGA Tour Golf for Windows — run in the PC's popular graphical interface. Great computerized golf is a "gimme" with both packages, but once that's behind you, their differences make choosing as much a matter of personal preference as anything else.

PLAY THE PROS

Because PGA Tour Golf for Windows is, more or less, a DOS game that's made the move to Windows, it's no surprise that this simulation retains many of the characteristics, both good and bad, of its C>: forerunner. In Electronic Arts' game, you become part of the prestigious PGA Tour, playing round after round against the pros, trying to make the cut, and ultimately win the tour. The tour aspect — think of it as golf's campaign mode — makes this simulation both fun and challenging.

Although PGA Tour Golf features the names and likenesses of various PGA pros, including Craig Stadler, Paul Azinger, Fuzzy Zoeller, and

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Larry Mize, it limits their participation. The pros' names appear on the tournament's scoreboards, and selected pros offer advice on each hole, but that's it. You don't actually hit the fairway with Fuzzy, or play Stadler head to head, as this game's title might lead you to believe. While you play, the announcer updates you on your competitors' progress, but you essentially finish your round, then wait to see whether you make the cut as the computer calculates everyone else's score.

At its default settings, PGA Tour Golf for Windows offers several views of each hole. The game first shows you a helicopter shot of the hole, as if you were flying over the course in an aerial survey. Next, you're shown an overhead view of the hole — here you can determine distances with a cursor. Last, you look down the fairway from behind your golfer, the traditional game view.

Like many golf simulations, PGA Tour Golf for Windows lets you aim your shot with a cross-hair, and operates with a conventional three-click power bar (one to start the backswing, the second to set the power level, and the third to snap the shot). One PGA Tour Golf feature of note is that its power bar adjusts itself for club distances automatically, something particularly useful for the beginner who can't recite the potential distances of the clubs from memory.

When you get on or near the green, the game slaps a grid atop the putting surface to show its contours and breaks. You can rotate the grid to view it at different angles. It's unfortunate, though, that you can't shoot and view the grid at the same time, although you can aim your shot on the grid. Certain other games on the market — particularly Links and Microsoft Golf — let you view the grid and take your putt simultaneously.

Although this one is obviously a Windows game, PGA Tour Golf's display is a fixed size on screen, so you can't maximize the window for a larger view. It does behave well within the Windows environment. If you select other windows or open the PGA icon or window, it lets you pause a game and pick it up again where you left off.

PGA Tour Golf comes with four courses — TPC at Avenel, TPC at Sawgrass, PGA West Stadium, and Sterling Shores. They're based on actual course blueprints. The Windows version of the game, like its DOS ancestor, is known for tracking many statistics, including longest drive, driving accuracy, and, most important, earnings.

If you have an audio card, PGA Tour Golf for Windows features music and sound effects. The graphics are attractive, but can't match the semi-realistic look of other programs, such as Accolade's latest Jack Nicklaus Golf and Course Design, or Access' Links.

What's the final scorecard? PGA Tour is a satisfying simulation, and works flawlessly under Windows.

MULLIGANS FOREVER

Microsoft Golf looks and acts like Access' Links. And it should — Access worked with Microsoft to develop this golfer's simulation. This feels as much like a direct port of Links to Windows as anything.

Links' best traits are here, including excellent and realistic graphics images. Microsoft Golf, like Links, comes with the Torrey Pines Golf Course; other add-on courses will follow. And, like Links, Microsoft Golf's level of detail is impressive. For example, you can adjust everything from the way you stand over the ball to the angle of the club face as it meets the ball.

Microsoft Golf uses the Links-style swing bar, too. Unlike the straight power bars used in other games, this swing bar is shaped like a crescent and resembles the actual motion of a swing more closely. Its application is a bit different, as well, in that you hold the button down through the backswing, letting go at the point where you want the stroke's power, then clicking again to snap the shot.

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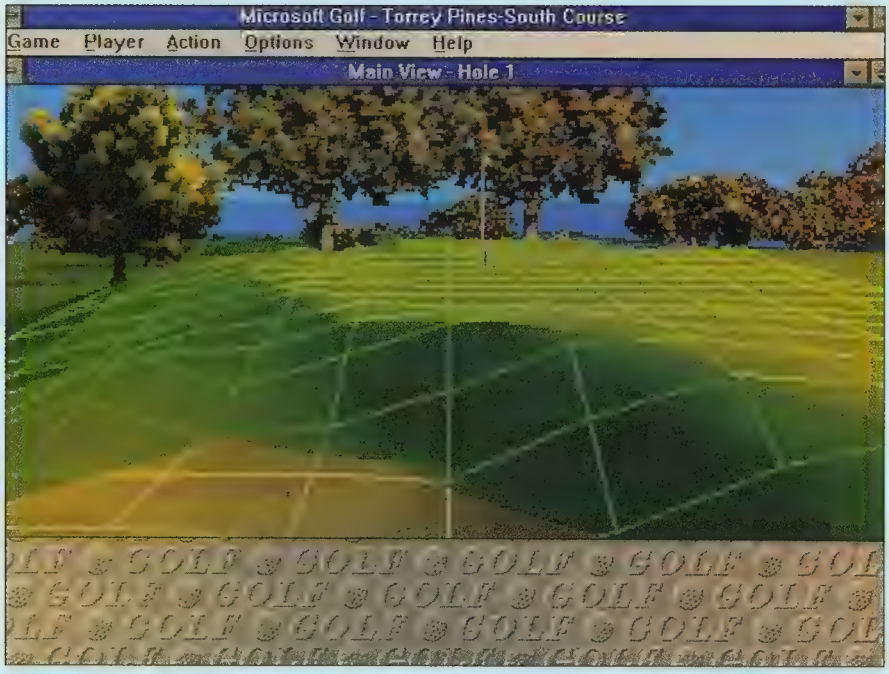

Microsoft Golf: A grid superimposed on the green lets you see breaks when you putt.

While other golf programs such as PGA Tour Golf for Windows and Accolade's Jack Nicklaus Golf and Course Design use two-dimensional icons to line up the shots, Microsoft Golf sets up a 3-D pole that moves nearer to or farther from your digital golfer. The pole also indicates its distance from you at all times, which is helpful when you're trying to figure out the yardage to the dogleg or bunker. On the green, Microsoft Golf superimposes an optional grid to show you the breaks and contours while you putt, something PGA Tour can't do.

Another Microsoft Golf gift is its Links-like ability to give you unlimited mulligans — do-overs — a boon to both struggling beginners and low-score-hounding pros.

On the down side (and this is also true of Links), Microsoft Golf's semi-realistic graphics images can make it difficult to spot some objects — particularly the flag — against the game's background.

Microsoft Golf is an outstanding Windows adaptation of an already excellent golf simulation. The swing bar, shot info, golfer's view, overhead view, and scoreboard all appear in separate windows you can arrange on screen any way you want. These individual windows make up part of a larger Microsoft Golf window.

You only have to show or open the windows that convey the information you need. You can't change the sizes of the windows, but it's nice to control the screen like this. If you don't want to view your score constantly, for instance, just close its window.

Microsoft Golf's graphics images are more spectacular than those in PGA Tour Golf for Windows. The game makes better use of the Windows interface (big surprise), plays great golf, and gives you more control over the environment. PGA Tour Golf for Windows, on the other hand, adds the excitement of competitive play to the mix.

The choice, like selecting a favorite golf club, is one of personal preference. Neither simulation puts you in the rough — both are well worth the greens fee.

Microsoft Golf
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QUEST FOR GLORY I

By Bernie Yee

Sierra's been busy lately remaking its history. It recently revamped the original Leisure Suit Larry to full 256-color VGA, and even Space Quest IV poked some fun at itself by letting players "travel" back to an earlier EGA vision of the game. So it should come as no surprise that Sierra-the-plastic-surgeon has finished a facelift on one of its most popular games, and ended up with Quest for Glory I: So You Want to Be a Hero. Released originally in 1989 as Hero's Quest, Quest for Glory I re-introduces itself, this time to a whole new generation of gamers.

But if you've played the original, there's little reason to plunk down your hard-earned clams for this (or any other) remake, no matter how dazzling — unless you're very curious and have a great deal of disposable income.

UPDATING A CLASSIC

Quest for Glory I is a hybrid graphics adventure/fantasy role-playing game. The limitations of each half will be apparent quickly to devotees of both genres, but their strengths combine nicely to make a unique game.

Quest looks like a graphics adventure, with the now-familiar point-and-click icon interface, and includes some fairly traditional adventure-game-style puzzles. But it also contains a few role-playing elements, from a handful of spells to its town and country settings. The combination adds up in the end.

Character creation, identical here to the original's, begins your quest. You can play a thief, fighter, or magic user, and you even have attributes you can modify. Each class has different abilities, of course, which means that there are several different paths to success, because each class requires different solutions to the same puzzles. Because each character class exposes you to situations others never see, you can actually replay Quest.

Your character begins in the town of Spielburg, a typical full-of-woe place just waiting for an ambitious adventurer like you. Brigands are terrorizing the townsfolk, and a witch has kidnapped the local Baron's youngsters, then placed a curse on the man. Before you rush off to the rescue, though, you must learn the

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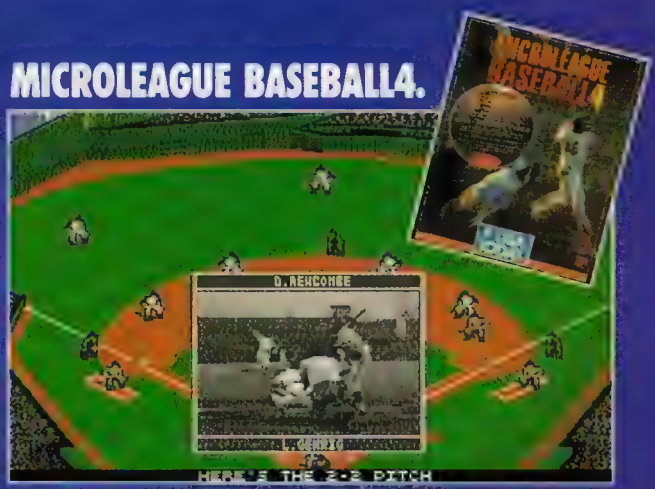

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right skills, pick up some information, and arm yourself for the tasks ahead. As in most games, your character gains experience in combat. While you're weak, it's a good idea to run from battle, rather than invite confrontation.

The first thing you'll notice about Quest is its graphics — no, not just the 256-color VGA images, but the animation. Painting-like landscapes (common in games such as Conquests of the Longbow) are here, too, along with Claymation-style animation that makes the figures' movement fluid and realistic, even in a 16-color EGA mode. Sound has been dramatically improved, too, with digitized grunts and noises in combat, and vastly better musical support to boot.

Of course, Quest sports Sierra's icon-driven interface, which takes all of about a minute to master. If you move the mouse pointer up to the top of the screen, icons appear — *walk*, *grab*, *talk*, *look* — while the cursor becomes any one of the icons with a click of the left-hand button. Still, Hero Quest's mechanics are untouched. Combat in Quest for Glory I remains real-time, and you control your character's offensive and defensive movements. And though it's hard to direct your character when his experience is low, as time passes and he becomes more skilled the controls become more fluid. After you've practiced fighting monsters in the forest, you'll be able to tackle the

Quest for Glory I: a hybrid adventure/fantasy role-playing game.

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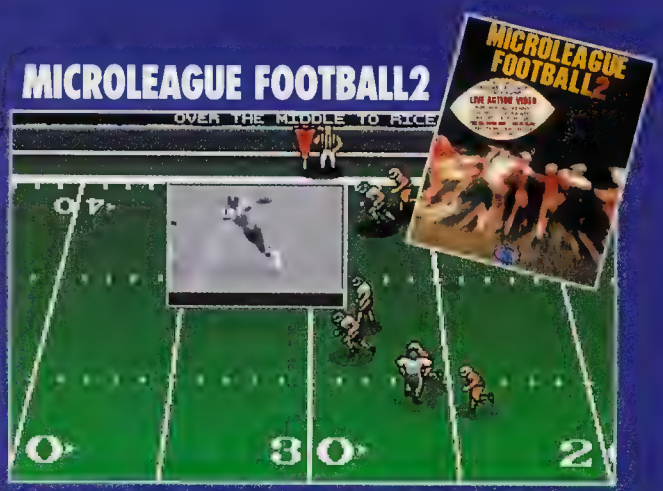
MICROLEAGUE FOOTBALL2



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HE NAME OF THE GAME IS

EAGUE

Risk for Windows: a conquer-the-world game making the move from board to PC.

brigands and the witch and move onto greater things.

OLD STUFF VS. NEW IDEAS

Put the dazzling graphics and sound aside, though, and reservations — at least for some — crop up.

Typically, the simpler a game's interface, the easier its puzzles, something that holds true for Quest for Glory. I've played Zork, and Quest for Glory I is no Zork.

But one question goes begging more loudly than any other. Who will buy Quest for Glory I? If you haven't seen the original, you're in for some fun. Quest is a hybrid that opens up the traditional adventure game with its role-playing elements. But I find it hard to believe that many of you would buy the same game twice just to admire the view.

Sierra should devote its energies to making new games with new environments, rather than recycling old themes. The concept may sell — look at Leisure Suit Larry — but it's as creatively fresh as running Tara and Scarlett through another episode of *Gone with the Wind.*

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible, 10MHz 286 or faster, 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, Sound Blaster, Sound Source, Thunderboard; mouse recommended; $59.95

RISK FOR WINDOWS

By Gregg Keizer

Hail the conquering hero! Caesar of the modern age! Alexander of America! These accolades may be absent from Risk for Windows, Virgin Games' translation of the classic board game to the graphical interface, but that's about all that's missing. This strategy game makes it to the PC intact, includes a few features that make it an even better game under Windows, and offers up some worthwhile enemies on the altar of military domination.

Risk for Windows sure beats the board game. If you're working in Windows, want a break, and don't want to juggle falling blocks (Tetris), play cards (Solitaire), or hit a shot from the tee (Microsoft Golf), take Risk. It's no risk.

Risk's no stranger to the PC. Its DOS version, also from Virgin, has been around the block. Shareware versions aren't unknown, either. But by heading to Windows, Risk becomes much more like the original board-and-block Parker Brothers game. Rather than let you look through a viewport at just a portion of the map as you do in DOS, this Windows version shows you the global picture at a single glance.

If you've played the board game, you can toss aside the thin manual and go right to work. If you're new to the world-conquest scene, a brief run through the documentation — either on paper or the program's on-line help — should suffice, although the game's mechanics are, in an age of monster simulations, laughably easy.

The goal, of course, is to win the world. Each player (two to six, with combinations of human and computer allowed) grabs an equal number of the globe's 42 territories, divides an equal number of armies throughout that domain, then tries to swallow up the opposition. Combat is resolved with dice, just as in the board game, and hinges more on superiority of numbers and a craps-like luck than anything. A bunch of extras, including bonus reinforcements for holding complete continents and accumulating matched sets of cards, lend a bit of drama to the game.

Even before you start a round of Risk, you'll notice some intriguing possibilities. Although you can wage war against other humans, this game's made to play against artificial opponents. You can set the ferocity of your enemies, making each aggressive, merely assertive, or uninterested in the attack. These opponents may not be bright, but they're enemies worthy of respect. At an aggressive level, for instance, an opponent attacks until nearly exhausted.

Electronic enemies play smart from the start when players divvy up the world. Because you get extra armies for controlling a continent, a computer opponent will try to stake out land masses of its own and keep you from claiming yours. They're particularly fond of Australia, which in Risk is a veritable fortress, because

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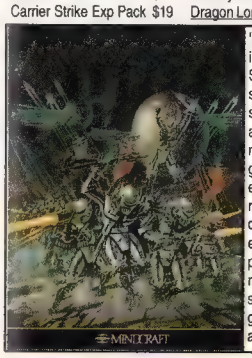

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there's only one entrance and exit to the Land Down Under.

Because you can set the number of your opponents and their dispositions, Risk for Windows makes for fine experimentation. You can dabble with a new strategy against both timid and xenophobic enemies, without the potential of embarrassing yourself in front of a bunch of friends. The only thing you can't do is strike alliances with these silicon players.

THE TEN-MINUTE WAR

Risk takes advantage of some, though not enough, of Windows' features. You place armies, select territories to attack, and shift reinforcements by pointing and clicking. Several menus at the top of the display hold the important options and commands. But Risk refuses to expand its global map to fill the entire screen — a waste of video desktop, especially when you have a larger monitor. And though it would be relatively easy to stick thumbnails of your bonus cards in a separate window, Risk makes you look at them one at a time — Windows-stupid.

Even so, Risk is a good Windows game, not because of how it looks, but because of the way it lets you play. As in any Windows game, you can bounce in and out of Risk at will, stopping work to run through a few attacks, then going back to the spreadsheet if the tide starts to turn against you.

Risk helps here, too, because it lets you turn on a fast-speed option to pick up the pace. Set Risk's speed to *fast*, and the computer opponents blitz through their turns. The only times the game pauses are when it asks you how stubbornly you want to defend against attack and, of course, when it's your turn. You literally can play a complete game, from regional lackey to master of the world, in ten minutes or so. If you want to play at a more-leisurely pace, you can save games in progress for later attention.

Your only complaints will center on some minor flaws, such as the game's refusal to post blow-by-blow results of any battle other than those in which you're involved. You're forced to watch the dice at the top of the display and mentally figure out which computer player is getting the short end of the stick.

Risk for Windows is not only a passable translation from board to monitor, it's also a game that's been tweaked to work within Windows. The end may not be world domination every time you play — the computer players win often enough to keep it interesting — but it's always worth the trip to the ramparts. Hail, o great one!

Virgin Games, 18061 Fitch Ave., Irvine, CA 92714, (714) 833-8710; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM, Microsoft Windows 3.0 or later; Hercules, EGA, VGA; supports Sound Blaster; requires hard-disk drive, mouse; $49.99

ZOOKEEPER

By Heidi E. H. Aycock

Wasn't that a whale singing near the PC? How did a snow leopard get under the desk? From the noise coming from the kids' room, it sounds as though they've adopted a collection of stray animals — wild animals.

A quick peek through the door sets your mind at ease. The kids are playing Davidson's latest release, an intriguing educational game called ZooKeeper. This trip to a digital zoo may have some minor problems, but in the end it's a charming excursion that keeps kids entertained while offering a basic lesson in zoology.

DON'T MESS WITH THE ANIMALS

ZooKeeper opens with a typical "edutainment" plot — kids must save something. This time it's one of the zoo's endangered species, which must be let loose in the wild. Kids act as substitute zoo keepers, and keep busy maintaining the habitats. No problem, you think — I'll just visit the animals and feed them. No such luck.

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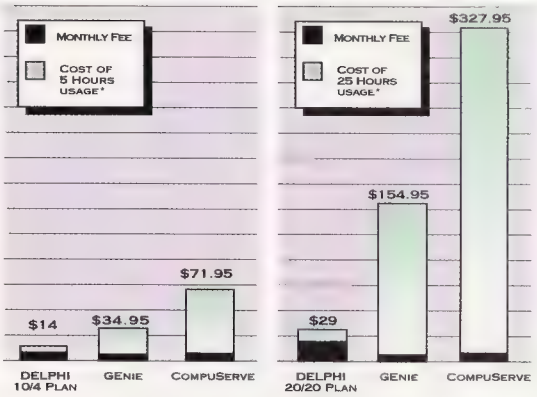

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As soon as you enter the zoo, you meet up with one of four troublemakers who strew trash, mix up the habitats' climate controls, and generally wreak havoc. You must follow the troublemaker to the animal he or she plans to torment, then correct any problems the creature creates. When you clean up the habitat, the animals return. No sooner have you coaxed one species back into view when another troublemaker pops up to disrupt more animals' homes. Only when you've corralled all four disrupters can you take an endangered animal to its natural habitat. You get to see the animal romping with its mate and a new offspring, then wave goodbye to the truck that takes the creature to freedom.

Throughout all this criminal chasing and animal husbandry, kids learn a lot about the world. They learn how 51 different animals live, they learn about how some animals became extinct (a few of the 51, such as the dodo, are already eradicated), they even learn how zoos replenish endangered species by strengthening their ranks in captivity, then releasing them. Most of all, kids learn how important it is to care for more than just the tiny corner of the planet they inhabit. This program may teach some science, but it also teaches responsibility. It's a great way to see life on Earth as an interconnected mesh of creatures.

But all this teaching would be useless if it weren't presented in an interesting, accessible way. ZooKeeper's developers understand that fact as well as they understand how the Martinique muskrat became extinct.

ZooKeeper's excellent graphics images are a good example. By combining cartoon-style images and digitized backgrounds, ZooKeeper creates an attractive look and an interesting interface. The animal close-ups are especially impressive. When viewed on a VGA monitor, these beautiful digitized photos show off the animals quite well.

Sound adds to the ZooKeeper experience, too. Whenever you see an animal, you also get to hear it. The whales are the best. As they swim into view, they sing in high-pitched, eerie voices. The sound clips are short, and some aren't as realistic as the whale voices, but this part adds still more depth to the learning environment.

Cartoon-style images and digitized backgrounds make ZooKeeper attractive.

But ZooKeeper doesn't stop at its presentation. This integrated game is both easy and intriguing to play. Learning ZooKeeper's play mechanics is a simple task. With a little confidence and curiosity, you can get started easily with almost no help. At first, you can explore the zoo without a particular goal. Then you can try your hand at chasing the troublemakers.

The interface is intuitive, with commands executed by clicking the mouse when the cursor's atop an object. Kids can also rely on the *New User Help* messages, which tell them what to do next. If they'd rather consult the manual, they'll find the documentation so easy to read it might have been written by their ZooKeeper companion Funk E. Monkey.

NEXT BEST THING TO BEING THERE

Although playing ZooKeeper is easy, winning isn't. This multilevel game gets more difficult as kids play along. In the early stages, the troublemakers give kids hints about their next destination through straightforward picture clues. After a while, though, they offer only hints. Besides moving players up through the ranks, ZooKeeper stays fresh by following the troublemakers instead of wandering freely. That should keep kids heading for a new animal each time.

ZooKeeper's only fault is that it doesn't encourage players to explore on their own. While the program does allow some aimless wandering, there's always a troublemaker to follow and an endangered species waiting to be rescued. If Davidson had included two modes for the game — one for exploring and one for pursuing a goal — ZooKeeper would be a more flexible learning tool. As it is, players may feel pressure to perform when they would rather investigate randomly.

Speed is ZooKeeper's only other problem. On a 20-megahertz 386SX, the beta version of this game was painfully slow, especially as images were drawn from disk. Faster performance also would smooth animation. Perhaps the shipping version of ZooKeeper won't be as sluggish.

Even so, ZooKeeper is a wonderful children's program. While it's packed with educational value, the game is

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GRAPHICS ULTRA
FAHRENHEIT 1280
WINMAX

By Tom Campbell

If you play golf and want to hit the ball farther down the fairway with more accuracy, you've probably eyed one of those huge drivers from Wilson. Likewise, if Windows tees you off by putting hazards and obstacles into your computer golf games, consider one of the big boys of video boards, an accelerator card. It can help any duffer.

The best and most cost-effective way to improve Windows' performance is to add a video-accelerator card, rather than upgrading your computer's microprocessor. In fact, a 386/33-megahertz PC with a Windows accelerator performs as fast or faster than a 486/33 with a standard VGA or SVGA card. Why? Because accelerators address the perceived flaws of Windows in areas such as bit-block transfer (*BitBlt*), line drawing, and area fills. These intensive graphics calculations are some of the reasons Windows is such a poor video performer.

Will an accelerator card add to your gaming pleasure? That depends. Let's take a look at the basic problems facing Windows, examine some solutions and see whether any of them makes a difference.

High-resolution displays tend to slow video performance because they must handle such large quantities of information; there are simply more pixels to be displayed. At a resolution of 1280 by 1024 pixels, for instance, the computer's processor and bus (the exit from the PC to the video display) must handle more than 1.3 million pixels per screen. Another bottleneck is the fact that most display cards are designed to work in 16-bit expansion slots, which are limited to a bus speed of 8 megahertz. Slow processor speeds keep performance below par, too.

Acceleration is the solution. A new generation of accelerator cards can increase the speed of Windows tenfold (compared to standard VGA cards). In practice, many applications running on a system equipped with one of these boards scroll, redraw windows, and refresh screens noticeably faster than an unaccelerated system.

Graphics accelerators usually use special chips that accept specific graphics functions from the PC's microprocessor and translate them into image information within the display adapter, bypassing the processor itself. I examined three solutions — the WinMax, which uses a Weitek G5186 graphics controller; the Orchid Technology Fahrenheit 1280, which relies on the Sierra S3 chip; and ATI's Graphics Ultra, which uses a proprietary Mach 8 coprocessor chip. Prices range from $299 to almost $700.

I installed and tested these three accelerator boards in two PCs: a low-end 386SX/25MHz and, at the top, a 486/33MHz machine, both running Windows 3.1. At high resolutions, results were easy to spot on the 386 (even without technical benchmarks), but not so obvious on the 486. At 640-by-480 resolution, performance improvements were less apparent.

THE CONTESTANTS

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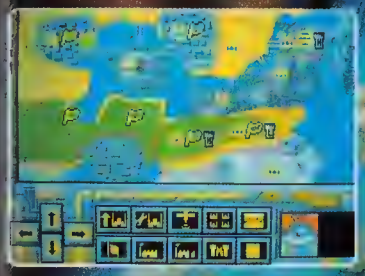

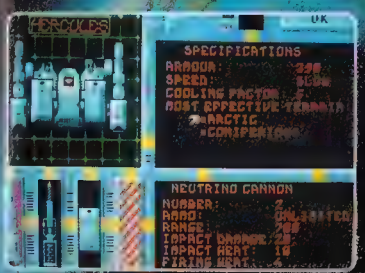

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DRAM for Windows, and can accommodate scan rates as high as 72 hertz for flicker-free 1024-by-768 resolution. The Ultra installs and configures simply, and runs as fast as any accelerator in its price range.

The Ultra offers more than speed, though, because the included Crystal fonts produce clean, crisp, and very readable type on the monitor, even at small point sizes. This attractive feature improves text readability noticeably in Windows applications on small monitors (or any monitor working in 1024-by-768 mode). Crystal fonts work under Windows and can coexist with other font solutions, such as Adobe Type Manager, FaceLift, or TrueType, although naturally they don't come into play in a DOS application or game. If you stare at your monitor all day long (whether for work or long periods at play), need crisp text, and want to avoid eyestrain, the ATI Graphics Ultra is for you.

ATI provides a five-year warranty and good technical support, but the documentation should make additional support unnecessary. The company supplies a wide variety of drivers optimized for popular computer-aided design, spreadsheet, and desktop-publishing programs, as well as for Windows 3.1.

Orchid Technology's Fahrenheit 1280 graphics accelerator is also an ace. Like the Graphics Ultra, the 1280's Windows driver allows separate access to 16- and 256-color modes at high resolutions. A unique feature is that Orchid inserts a setup utility right into the Windows control panel for selection of resolutions and color modes.

The Fahrenheit 1280 offers flicker-free performance and 32,768 screen colors at all resolutions except interlaced 1280-by-1024 mode. (I've yet to see a game that needs all that, though.) This board is fully compatible with previous graphics standards, as well as with interlaced and non-interlaced monitors.

Driver installation is menu-driven and convenient. Orchid supplies more than most vendors, offering drivers for a variety of CAD, spreadsheet, word-processing, and desktop-publishing programs. Documentation is generous. Overall, the Fahrenheit 1280 gives admirable performance for a modest price. Orchid offers a four-year warranty and excellent technical assistance.

WinMax, which uses the Weitek W5186 chip and VRAM, runs between two and seven times faster than an ordinary VGA card when doing bit-block transfers, and about twice as fast for line-function handling. (In other words, it's not as fast as the Graphics Ultra or the Fahrenheit 1280.) This board made a remarkable difference in screen-scrolling performance while working in DOS software, but compared to the other two choices, fell short in Windows.

While not a heavyweight like the others, WinMax does improve Windows performance. It installs easily and performs without a hitch. Offering resolutions of 1024-by-768 pixels with 72-hertz refresh rates, improved DOS accelerations, and a five-year warranty, this entry-level board is a reasonable choice for game machines running Windows part-time.

SURE IT'S FAST, BUT IS IT WORTH IT?

To sum up, I used WinTach from Texas Instruments to determine Windows performance for word-processing, CAD, spreadsheet, and paint-program operations. The Graphics Ultra and Fahrenheit 1280 were comparable, with both increasing average performance from three to six times that of standard VGA. WinMax worked about half as hard.

Windows performance can be improved significantly using other techniques, too. One is to add more RAM so that the machine packs at least 4 megabytes (although 8 megabytes is better); another is to upgrade from Windows 3.0 to 3.1, making sure you obtain and install 3.1's improved screen drivers.

The real question, of course, is what do these boards do for game playing? Are they worth it? Are they even necessary? Maybe. Play something such as PGA Tour Golf for Windows, for instance, a game that demands substantial video-pixel power to display courses and accompanying scenery, and you'll notice a slight improvement when you have an accelerator inside your PC. All three cards made the screen update faster, reducing the wait for the next drive or putt. (One reason these boards have such unimpressive results with PGA Tour Golf is that the game doesn't use high-resolution screens. In fact, it doesn't even demand a full 640-by-480 pixels.)

On the other hand, if your Windows gaming runs towards simulations — such as Maxis' RoboSport, SimCity, or A-Train — the accelerated results are impressive. These Windows games take advantage of high resolutions. Here's where the accelerator cards will improve your pleasure.

What's the bottom-line advice? If you use a computer just for games, it's going to be tough justifying buying one of these cards. But if your work is within Windows, and you're spending time playing there, too, you'll want one of these big boys.

They may not improve your swing, but they'll certainly shorten your Windows strokes.

Graphics Ultra
ATI Technologies, 3761 Victoria Park Avenue, Scarborough, Ontario M1W3S2, Canada, (416) 756-0718; IBM PC or compatible; requires IBM 8513/14/15 analog color monitor or NEC MultiSync or compatible; $599 512K, $699 1MB

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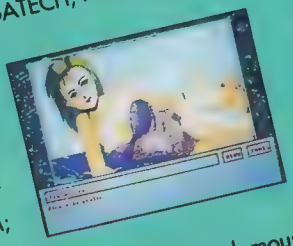

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AIR FORCE COMMANDER

By Ed Ferrell

The Middle East — the world's powder keg. It may be Lebanon against Jordan, Syria against Israel, or Iraq against all comers, but the potential for violence won't go away. Ancient hostilities combine with leading-edge firepower and satellite intelligence to make this flashpoint between cultures and religions oh so ripe for war.

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TOP GUN — NOT!

As commander, you're outside the cockpit, faced with a satellite map of the Middle East instead of a weapon-systems panel. Pointing and clicking zooms the radar screen to reveal white, red, green, and blue dots, representing various ground installations, roads, and major cities. Pointing at these installations gives you up-close-and-personal satellite information. In this spy-in-the-sky view, air bases appear as complexes of buildings on screen, with everything from radar dishes to supply depots visible.

A wall of moving green flecks covers most of the map: It's the area outside your radar's current range. You can extend your electronic coverage if you have AWACS planes available. Sooner or later you'll notice red-and-white poles heading toward your airspace. They're enemy aircraft, and the length of the pole represents their altitudes. The enemy begins attacking right away, in real time, and by clicking the satellite pointer on these poles you get a close-up shot of the type of aircraft approaching.

The observant Commander realizes quickly that there are no friendly poles on the map. Not that you're powerless, it's just that all planes and equipment start out in mothballs, waiting for you to activate them.

Clicking on your own bases brings up an information panel you'll use to issue orders to the planes and equipment at that location. After they're activated, planes can be ordered on patrol, circular sweeps, anti-armor strikes, and interception missions. Air combat is resolved automatically by the computer, based on ratings of the planes involved.

Once your radar has located crucial targets, you can send repeated bombing runs with the auto-launch option. F-15s will bomb, return, and load and bomb again in this mode. Patriot missiles, if available, launch automatically after activation.

Should your country or alliance be fortunate enough to have cruise missiles, you'll have an easier time knocking out the enemy's hardened ground targets. But a cruise missile is costly and, once fired, requires several turns before another can be armed.

Forget WWII tactics. Saturation bombing with today's smart weapons is stupid. Taking out the enemy's radar and extending your own with AWACS do more to win the war than destroying an air base physically. (The manual includes a discussion of the development of modern air warfare.)

In some Air Force Commander scenarios, the objective springs from local bickering among small oil-rich states and requires delicate, surgical strikes to win without incurring negative public opinion. In the *Anarchy* scenario, the whole region explodes. Playing a scenario to the finish, then reversing the roles, is the best test of your command and control skills.

As in the real world of high-tech military might, missions expend precious resources that aren't easily replaced. Your job is as much about managing these limited resources as it is about planning offensive missions. Part of the tension in this combat zone comes from the need to shift resources among your own bases and make the tradeoffs necessary to strike the enemy and protect your airspace at the same time.

Fuel and ammunition supplies are quickly depleted during auto-launch combat runs, and with resupply happening only once every 12 hours, they need to be husbanded, too. Even activating aircraft for later use eats up resource points, as the fully fueled and armed squadron sits on the runway.

There's more to this game than sheer military might: Even when totally outgunned, you can try to upset the enemy population's morale by destroying water supplies and power plants. Demoralization can force a victory from your opponent, as can air superiority and unfavorable media opinion.

THE REAL NINTENDO WAR

Today's Phantom, Mirage, and stealth aircraft, in conjunction with satellite reconnaissance and smart missile systems, demand decisions before planes are launched. With the accuracy and destructive power of the weapons in the Middle East, you've got to think of the consequences long before you send planes winging their way toward targets.

Laser-guided weapons and fly-by-wire cockpits make it a good bet that you'll hit your target; in Air Force Commander, you must decide *which* targets to hit, *which* missions to fly. The flyboys carry out the missions, while you watch it all happen on your own PC radar screen. This is the *real* Nintendo war. ❑

Impressions, 7 Melrose Drive, Farmington, CT 06032, (203) 676-9002; IBM PC or compatible, 640K RAM; VGA, SVGA; supports AdLib, SoundBlaster; mouse recommended; $59.95

CRUSADERS OF THE DARK SAVANT

By Bernie Yee

Some companies just like to tease. But after long delays, Crusaders of the Dark Savant is on the verge of release. By press time, it should be on the shelves.

Although playable in early beta form, both the game's world and its puzzles were incomplete. This final beta version includes a completely implemented world and finished puzzles. All that's left to do is comb the terrain, looking for bugs. I haven't found any serious ones.

Crusaders has remained true to Bane designer David Bradley's vision. It takes you out of the cave and into a huge and richly detailed world. Shimmering seas, dark caverns, and forest roads spread out before your feet. All this appears in a revamped 256-color VGA display.

The Crusaders' world is rendered in a dark, moody fashion that surrounds your party in an air of pensiveness. The interface is a full point-and-click affair, and includes a limited drag-and-drop aspect too, as you can drag items from one player to another. It's not the object-oriented realism of Ultima Underworld and Eye of the Beholder, but when you drop items, they do remain on the ground for you to recover.

Automapping has been added as well, but it doesn't match that found in Underworld. Your automap becomes more detailed as your mapping skills increase, and the automap even surveys areas of darkness. This feature makes sense: If you can map an area through trial and error, your characters should be able to do it, too.

A few quirks linger throughout the game. If you kill a foe, he explodes and his weapons disappear. This fiction works for the robotic Savant minions, but not for Gorns swinging spears.

Of course, the game's system is a direct descendent of the well-designed engine of Bane of the Cosmic Forge. Crusaders takes advantage of the computer's ability to crunch numbers, so every sword swung, every spell cast, sends the computer into a flurry of calculations.

Bradley's sense of continuity, a rare thing among computer role-playing designers, lets you import your party from Bane — an option that's highly recommended. They're demoted to fifth-level characters and only some of their goodies will be transferred, but the option gives you some instant firepower.

Crusaders' plot is fascinating. If you finished Bane, your start in Crusaders depends on the ending you reached in the prequel. (Of course, you can cold-start Crusaders if you haven't finished, or even played, Bane.) Each start sets you up a bit differently, effectively making Crusaders several games in one.

You're on the planet Guardia, searching for the secrets of the wizard Phoonzang. Your actions and choices create alliances and antagonism between your party of humans and the various aliens.

Crusaders: Beyond the exquisite display, a big, rich world awaits.

Science mixes with sorcery, and you'll encounter disgusting and sublime beings that test your notions of good and evil, beauty and ugliness. As in Bane, Crusaders' great strength lies in its management of non-player characters and the involved plot your party must unravel. As before, you can talk to non-player characters through the Infocom-like parser, which allows conversation in full sentences.

Crusaders features the most interesting storyline and the best-developed plot devices I've seen in a long time, but parts of Crusaders still feel anachronistic. The music and digitized sound effects can become tiresome. Monsters don't fall when you kill them, but explode instead. Crusaders may not change the face of role-playing, as did Ultima.

But who cares? With well-balanced game play, an expansive world populated with fascinating characters, and a well-written epic, Crusaders demonstrates that a game can come on two disks, take up less than 20 megabytes of hard-disk space, and still be utterly captivating. ❑

Sir-Tech Software, P.O. Box 245, Ogdensburg, NY 13669, (315) 393-6633; IBM PC or compatible; 10MHz or faster; 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; DOS 5.0 recommended; requires hard drive; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Thunderboard; supports extended memory; $69.95

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